THE DIAMOND MURDERS

THE DIAMOND MURDERS

By

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FRONT PAGE MYSTERIES

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EPISODE THE FIRST

THE BRASS-BOUND BOX

CHAPTER I

THE BRASS-BOUND BOX

It was a brilliant June morning in Plymouth, and the folks who filled the streets, under the cheery influence of the blue sky and the bright sunlight, went along their various ways as though there were no such things as care or anxiety in the world. To one man, however, who was strolling about the Town Hall Square with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his trousers, the general brightness of the morning mattered little or nothing. He was a broadly-built, brown-faced individual, roughly dressed in clothes that seemed to have seen much wear, and to have been more than once immersed in sea water, and the fact that his pea-jacket was tightly buttoned up about his throat argued that he either wore no shirt, or that his linen was not exactly presentable. His boots were seamed and split, and he dragged his feet a little as he walked, as though he were slightly footsore. His clean-shaven face and hard keen eyes scowled at the people whom he met, and once or twice, as he stood on the curb in front of the post office, he spat on the roadway at his feet in apparent contempt or derision. It needed no second glance at him to tell that he was down on his luck, and hated all the rest of the world in consequence.

As the clock of the Town Hall struck eleven, the man turned and walked slowly into the post office. He approached that part of the counter where callers' letters

are delivered, and, leaning towards the clerk in attendance, asked in a low voice if he had anything for John Lindsay. There was something in his tone which suggested that he had made the same application more than once before, with disappointing results; his question, indeed, was uttered in a spiritless and half careless fashion, which seemed to imply that he asked it as a mere matter of form, and expected nothing in answer to it but a blank negative. The clerk, however, immediately turned to the pigeon hole, labelled "L," and produced a dirty envelope, which he turned over gingerly.

"Where from?" he asked.

The man's eyes glittered for a second, and he half stretched out his hand for the letter.

"Ought to be from West Hartlepool," he said.

The clerk tossed the letter across the counter, finely indifferent to anything further connected with it or its recipient. Lindsay's hand trembled a little as he picked it up. He stepped to one side, and tore the envelope apart with rough haste. There was a half sheet of paper inside with a few lines of writing upon it. He scarcely glanced at this; his eyes eagerly devoured the sight of the two folded postal orders lying within. Lindsay opened them hurriedly: something like relief came into his expression as he realized that two golden sovereigns were about to lie in his palm. He walked over to the counter, seized a pen, filled in the blank spaces, took up the money which the clerk handed him, and walked out again into the blinding sunshine. He glanced at the clock—five minutes had made a change in his fortunes.

Lindsay turned away to the left, and went doggedly through the crowds until he came to the long street which

leads from Plymouth to Devonport. Presently he turned into a public-house and called for a pint of ale. There were some pork pies in a glass shade on the counter, he took one out, and then another, and ate both hungrily. When he had drunk the ale he called for a second pint, and helped himself to a third pie, and went on eating and drinking with a steady persistence. The barman looked at him with a smile.

"Got a bit of a twist on, eh?" he said jocularly.

"So would you have if you'd had nothing to eat for a whole twenty-four hours," answered Lindsay with a growl. "Here, give us one of your best smokes—a strong 'un, mind."

The barman produced a box of rank looking cigars. Lindsay picked out one, and threw down a sovereign. He counted his change carefully, and rang a two-shilling piece which formed part of it before sweeping the lot into his pocket.

"Take a smart 'un to do you!" said the barman, laughing.

"You're about right, young man," answered Lindsay. He lighted the cigar, sighed with pleasure as its fierce odour caught his nostrils, and went out into the street without a word or nod. There were still busier crowds there—soldiers, sailors, marines; all jostling each other in a good-humoured roughness. Lindsay took no heed of them, save to swear or curse when one or another rubbed shoulders with him: he walked on and on until he nearly came to Devonport. Suddenly he stopped, the cigar fell from his lips to the pavement, and lay there unheeded: and his eyes fixed themselves in genuine amazement on an object which lay prominently exposed in a shop window

He turned and stared at it; then picked up the cigar in an absent-minded fashion, and replaced it in his mouth. As he looked into the shop window he blew out great clouds of smoke; his broad chest heaved with excitement and agitation. For a long time he gazed and gazed, and at last stepped back with a sudden exclamation.

"It's the same," he said. He lifted his hand and wiped away the sweat from his forehead. "The same, by God. Well!"

He stepped still farther back, and looked curiously at the shop front.

It bore the name "Aaron Josephs" on the sign, and the goods displayed in the window indicated that the proprietor was one of those general dealers who trade in the strange articles of flotsam and jetsam that come to hand in the course of everyday life in maritime towns. Mr. Josephs' window was full of all sorts of odds and ends, from oilskins to foreign coins, but to the man staring into it with such wrapt attention there was only one object there which seemed worth looking at.

That object was a small box, fashioned of some dark wood and bound at the corners with heavy brasswork. In size it was somewhat larger than a cigarbox, but there was that something about its appearance which suggested weight. The wood of which it was made shone bright in the sunlight, but the brass mounting was as dull as though it had not been polished for some time. Lindsay looked at it again, and again, and his eyes grew keener with every look. His face wore the expression of a man who had sought for something in vain, given up the search as hopeless, and suddenly come across the very object of his desire.

"Yes, it's the same," he murmured at last. "The same after ten years! Well!"

He suddenly turned away, and walked slowly down the street. His face lost the expression of astonishment, and assumed that of anxious thought. He sauntered along, the cigar still burning in the corner of his mouth, and his hands once more deep in his pockets, his forehead puckered into lines and creases of serious deliberation.

"How to get hold of it again," he muttered to himself. "That's the job! That cursed Jew will smell a rat if I seem too eager about it, and I've got no money to satisfy him if he springs the price. Hang it, I will have it, though, whatever means I have to use. It's mine."

He presently crossed the street and walked back in the direction of the shop in which the brass-bound box lay. His eyes, fixed upon the pavement, took no heed of the passers-by, and consequently he did not observe a coloured man who came towards him and recognized him with no other sign of surprise than a sudden smile. He was a small, lithely built Hindu, clad in faded clothes of light texture, and wearing a dark-coloured turban, and he glided past Lindsay with the stealthiness of a cat. But, as soon as he had passed him, the Hindu turned and looked the retreating figure up and down with swift comprehending glances. Then he followed slowly, and so the two went along the street until Lindsay came abreast of the general dealer's shop. He paused for a moment before he crossed the roadway. At first his movements were uncertain and irresolute, then his pace quickened, and he went straight to the shop door and entered. The Hindu turned across the street at a different angle, and came back towards Mr. Josephs' window at a swift pace. He

went quickly by, and his alert eyes searched the window. They fell on the brass-bound box, and an extraordinarily observant onlooker might have seen a transient gleam of astonishment flash into them. Quick as thought the Hindu crossed the street again, and began to saunter up and down on the opposite side. His eyes seemed to see nothing in particular, but they were never off the door through which Lindsay had disappeared.

Mr. Aaron Josephs was reading the newspaper when Lindsay entered the shop.

He took in the man's poor appearance at a glance, and turned to him carelessly. Lindsay's fingers drummed on the counter.

"You've a bit of a box there in the window, mister," he said as calmly as he could. "It's the sort of thing I've been looking for to hold a few little things, like, that a man wants to keep locked up. Perhaps we can trade if the price isn't too much and it's a strong lock."

Mr. Aaron Josephs looked into the heterogeneous disorder of his window. He shook his head and glanced back at Lindsay's much worn pea-jacket.

"It's a beautiful box, that, my friend," he answered. "A curiosity. I'm afraid the price would be more than you'd care to give."

"How do you know?" said Lindsay. "Here, let's see it."

"Oh, you can see it," answered Mr. Josephs. "No harm in looking at it that I know of."

He took the box out of the window and set it on the counter. Lindsay's eyes assumed a new eagerness: his fingers trembled as he tapped the dark wood. Mr. Josephs noticed his agitation.

"Ay, it's a nice piece of work," Lindsay said, trying to

appear unconcerned. "It'll just hold two or three little matters. What might you be wanting for it, mate?"

Mr. Josephs tapped the lid. The box sounded very hollow.

"Oh, well, now, what would you give? You see what beautiful wood it is, scented too, and the brass corners is lovely. You don't see a bit of work like that every day."

"I'll give you ten shillings," said Lindsay.

"Oh, so help me," said Mr. Josephs, snatching up the box and putting it on the shelf behind him. "Ten shillings! Oh, I couldn't sell it for ten pounds."

"What," said Lindsay, "ten pounds for a bit of wood and brass like that?"

"Ah, but the work, my friend! See here,"—he put the box back on the counter again—"look at the beautiful carving on the top, and the nice smell of the wood, and the solid brass at the corners—why, it is a piece of art, is that box."

"How much?" asked Lindsay. His eagerness was causing him to lose his temper: he spoke snappishly.

Mr. Josephs looked his customer over again.

"Ten pounds," he said shortly.

"Humph," muttered Lindsay. He leaned over the counter, putting his hard face close to the general dealer's. "Look here, mister," he said, "supposing that box isn't yours to sell at all! What then?"

Mr. Josephs started back, clutching the box in his hands. He looked from it to Lindsay: from Lindsay back to the box. His face paled a little.

"Eh?" he said. "What's that you say? This box not mine—not my property. Here, you get out of my shop. I don't want to have nothing to do with you."

"I dare say," answered Lindsay. It seemed to him that the general dealer was somewhat alarmed. His bullying manner increased. "Oh yes, I dare say," he continued. "But perhaps it's a case of having to, mister. I says, what if that box ain't yours? What if you've no right to sell it? What if them as it belongs to should turn up and ask you ugly questions? Eh! What if there should be summat said about receiving stolen property? Eh? What if——"

"Here!" interrupted Mr. Josephs, "none of that! You get out of my shop quick."

Lindsay's face grew ugly and determined. He kept his eyes fixed firmly on the Jew's.

"All right," he said suddenly. "I'm off, and I shall be back in two minutes with a policeman, mister."

He turned and walked quickly out of the door.

The Hindu, watching for his coming from the other side of the street, saw him look up and down as if in search of something. A policeman stood at the corner of a side street. Lindsay went up and spoke to him. The Hindu saw the policeman stare hard at his interrogator, and shake his head. He seemed somewhat puzzled, and it was with evident unwillingness that he finally walked back with Lindsay to the Jew's shop. The two men went inside, and the Hindu waited calmly for their reappearance.

Mr. Josephs was still behind the counter, handling the box, when the policeman and Lindsay entered. He looked up, and it seemed to the policeman that there was something of fear in his face.

"Now then," said Lindsay, with malicious triumph, and pointing to the box, "This is how things are. I happen to be walking along this street, and I see this box in this man's window. I recognize it for my property—lost some

years ago—and naturally I want it back. I offer this man a price for it, and he asks ten pounds. Ten pounds! Now I won't give him anything—cause why? It's mine—and I'll have it. Ain't that the law?"

The policeman looked from Mr. Josephs to Lindsay. The former seemed stupefied by Lindsay's last words.

"Of course, if it's yours, it's yours," said the policeman. "But I guess you'd have to prove it."

"Of course," echoed the Jew. "Why, anybody might come into the shop and say that things were theirs. Let him prove that it's his."

"I'll soon do that," said Lindsay, with startling readiness. "Now, mister, you'll acknowledge that since I came into this shop I haven't handled that box, except just to tap it on the top. Isn't that so?"

The general dealer nodded.

"Very well," continued Lindsay. "Turn up that box and you'll find a little brass plate underneath it with the letters J. L. and a date 1889 on it. Come now."

The Jew turned the box over unwillingly.

"Now then," said Lindsay, with malicious triumph, "what did I tell you? And if you want to know what J. L. means, look here."

Here he pulled out the letter which he received at the post office. "Look at that. Plain enough, ain't it? John Lindsay, that's me. That's a letter I had this morning from my brother at West Hartlepool. J. L.—John Lindsay —1889—the year I became possessed of that box. What do you say, officer?"

"It looks as if it was his box," said the policeman, looking at Mr. Josephs.

"Of course it's my box," said Lindsay angrily. "I lost

it five years ago when I was on the *Brahmaputra,* and I expect the thief sold it to this 'ere chap."

"It's not eighteen months since I bought it," cried the general dealer. "And if it was his box, how was I to know? Am I expected to ask the history of every article I buy?"

"You'll have an unpleasant history if you don't hand that article over," said Lindsay grimly. "Come on, let's have it."

The general dealer paused. What was it that made the man so eager to possess the brass-bound box? Could it be that it possessed some value which he himself had not credited it with? He grasped it more firmly in his hands, and resolved not to be brow-beaten.

"No," he said, "I shan't! If it's yours you must prove it in the right way. How do I know anything about you?"

The policeman looked at Lindsay's frowning face, and foresaw the beginning of a scene.

"Here," he said, "you'd better do it in a legal fashion. Go to a lawyer, if you're so particular about it."

"What," exclaimed Lindsay, "to a landshark like that, just to get my own! Here, Mister Jew, you'd better hand it over, or I'll——"

"None o' that," said the policeman. The matter was sliding over into his domain, and he felt somewhat relieved. "Can't have any threatening, my man. If Mr. Josephs has some property of yours, there's a proper way to get it. You can't take the law into your hands in this country."

"No, of course not," said Mr. Josephs, looking at the officer with gratitude. "Let him prove his case. I want to do nothing but what's right."

Lindsay looked firmly from one to the other.

"Oh," he said, "it's that way, is it? If a man finds another man in possession of property that don't belong to him, and that does belong to the other, there's got to be a law took about it, has there? Very well. You look out, Mr. Josephs, or whatever your name is. That there box is mine, and I'll have it. I'd ha' given a sovereign to get it quietly, but since you won't, you won't, and dearly you'll pay for it." He turned and walked out, leaving the general dealer and the policeman staring at each other.

"Shouldn't wonder if it is his," said the policeman.

"Maybe," answered Mr. Josephs, "but he will have to prove it first. It came to me in the ordinary way of business."

Lindsay walked straight across the street, and turned in the direction of Plymouth. Before he had gone a hundred yards he heard a faint cough close to his ear, and felt a hand placed lightly on his shoulder. He turned swiftly, and found himself face to face with the Hindu.

CHAPTER II

THE HINDU'S STORY

THERE was a curious smile on the Hindu's face, as he looked into the eyes of the man in the shabby pea-jacket; but there was no answering smile on Lindsay's. The angry look which had rested in it since Mr. Josephs had turned obstinate about the brass-bound box suddenly faded away, and gave place to one of mingled surprise and fear. Lindsay started back, and his mouth opened in a gape of astonishment.

"Where the devil did you come from?" he growled, staring at the Hindu. The other man smiled again—a smile that was neither pleasant nor reassuring.

"From going to and fro about the earth, Mr. Lindsay," he answered in perfect English, and with a low musical tone of voice. "Always seeking, but not until now finding, certain matters that I much desire to set eyes on."

"Go on set eyes on 'em, then, and be hanged to you," said Lindsay.

"Ah, but I have set eyes on them. I see one of them now. It is you. I saw another but a moment ago. That was your elegant little casket with the brass corners."

"So you've seen it?" said Lindsay. "Curse it! Of course, I might have known you were up to some devilry. It's a precious nice sort of day, this—a sort of surprise day. First of all, my brother, that never did me a good

turn before, sends me a couple o' quid—damn him, he might ha' sent me ten pound. Then I came across the box—it's in the hands of a Jew. Then I met you—as I thought was eaten by the sharks long since. Well, perhaps there's something else you'd like to see, Mr. Lal Dass,—Eh?"

"The other thing that I wanted to see," said the Hindu, calm and imperturbable as ever, "I have already seen. That was our friend, Mr. Stefano Vassalli."

"It's a lie," said Lindsay, making as if to seize the Hindu by the throat. "He's dead."

Lal Dass smiled, and shook his head with a decisive action.

"He is not. He lives. But do not be alarmed, Mr. Lindsay, he is where he cannot harm either of us."

"That's good news," said Lindsay, with unfeigned relief. He took out a dingy handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. "And where might that be?" he inquired.

The Hindu smiled again, and stretched a skinny forearm north by east.

"Over there on the moors," he said. "In Dartmoor."

Lindsay stared at him. His face puckered itself into fresh lines of wonder. He shook his head.

"Here," he said, "I don't understand,—I'm a bit flustered. We can't stand talking here. Let's turn in somewhere—where it's quite—and have this out. I've had too many surprises this morning."

"This way," said the Hindu. "There is a little quiet inn along this side street where we may talk in confidence. They know me there."

"That isn't saying much for them," muttered Lindsay, with an accent of suspicion. "I'd rather go somewhere where you're not known, if it's all the same to you."

Lal Dass smiled once more, regarding the Englishman with a half-amused expression.

"There is nothing to fear, my friend," he said. "Is it not one of your proverbs that circumstances alter cases? At present I cannot do without you, and you cannot do without me. Therefore——"

"Oh, shut your infernal jaw, and go on," snapped Lindsay. "I'm about sick of mysteries. But mind you, Mr. Lal Dass, if there's any hocus pocus work, I'm just the same man as ever I was."

He tapped his hip pocket significantly, and the Hindu smiled again, but this time with a suspicion of unpleasantness.

"There will be no occasion for that," he said gently. "Here we are—follow me, and be assured. This way."

He turned into an old-fashioned house that stood a little way along the side street, and preceded Lindsay along a low passage until they came to a door. The Hindu opened this, and revealed a small parlour, furnished with a table and two chairs. Lindsay examined his surroundings suspiciously. When he had satisfied himself that the walls were solid, and that the window looked into a small yard in the rear, he sat down, and glared fixedly at his companion.

"Will you take anything to drink?" asked Lal Dass with true Oriental politeness. "It is customary in your land to order something for the good of the house, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Lindsay, "I'll take a bottle of ale—and we'll have the cork drawn here," he added meaningly.

Lal Dass rang the bell, and gave the necessary orders to a stout, middle-aged woman, who greeted him familiarily.

When she had retired and left the two men to themselves, he bent forward and laid his hand on Lindsay's arm. "It was in this house," he said in a low voice, "that Stefano was robbed of the brass-bound box."

"Ah," exclaimed Lindsay. "So it was Stefano that got it, eh? Well, blow me if I didn't always have some notion that it might be him. And yet, again, I've thought as how it must have been you. Well, but how do you know?"

"It is not a difficult thing to work out," said Lal Dass. "There were three of us that knew of the box——"

"My box," interrupted Lindsay.

"Your box, certainly. There were three of us that knew of your box, and what it contained. I am one; you were another; Stefano was a third. We were all three on the *Brahmaputra* when she went to pieces, and it is evident that only one of us could have carried the box away with him."

"That wasn't me," growled Lindsay, "worse luck!"

"It was not I," said Lal Dass, "but then, of course, only I myself knew that. For a while I thought that you had it; and then I thought that Stefano had it; but it was not until last year that I knew he had had it."

"Which means for to say that he had it no longer?"

"Exactly. He had it no longer, and I never knew where it was until I saw it a few minutes ago."

The two men sat staring at each other after Lal Dass's last words. Each searched the other's face—the Hindu with keen steadfast eyes; Lindsay with a half furtive glance.

"Look here," said Lindsay. "What's it all mean? What's the true significance of it? I ain't good at riddles and mysteries—give us a plain reckoning of it."

"It means," answered the Hindu, "that in the beginning Stefano carried away the box. Somehow or other he got to this place, Plymouth, at last. As I explain it, he deposited the box with the man who then kept this inn, no doubt asking him to take care of it until he returned. He must then have been a long time away, and when he came back the man had sold the box."

"Well, well," said Lindsay, "And then——?"

"Or, at any rate, as I read the story, the box was not forthcoming—perhaps the man thought that Stefano was never coming back, and had disposed of it with Stefano's other effects."

"All guess-work," interrupted Lindsay contemptuously. "It's your infernal way of putting things together that never had no existence."

"So, when Stefano found that out," continued Lal Dass imperturbably, "there was a disagreement. You remember that Stefano was a man of violent temper. I conclude that he had laid hands on the man, and that they fought. And, of course, Stefano had a knife, and it was with the knife that he killed him."

"Killed him?"

"Yes, he killed him in this very room. The man was found sitting in your chair, stabbed through the heart."

Lindsay left his seat hastily and stood back against the wall.

"Here," he said, "none o' your nasty tales to me. D'ye mean to say that Stefano stabbed the man to death in that there chair where I've been a-sitting quiet and peaceful?"

"Yes, it is so," answered the Hindu.

Lindsay surveyed the chair with a certain amount of repugnance.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said. "Here, I ain't agoing to sit there any more. Go on with your yarn, Mr. Lal Dass; I'll have it standing."

"I was in Plymouth at the time," continued the Hindu. "I read it in all the newspapers—the case before the magistrates, and the trial at the superior court—the assizes, are they not called?—and everything. The defence was that Stefano had entrusted valuable property to the care of the landlord of this little inn, and, on coming back for it, he could not get it restored to him, and so lost his temper and began fighting, with the result that he used his knife and killed the man who had misused the property. At first everybody said he would be hanged; but in the end the Court found him guilty of manslaughter, and he was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude."

"Why didn't they hang him?" growled Lindsay. "He'd ha' been better out of the way altogether."

"You perceive now why I made myself acquainted with this house," continued the Hindu. "There was talk and chatter of the affair amongst folks that I wanted to know what property it was that Stefano had been so eager to reclaim. I kept my ears open. The widow of the dead man retained this house for a time, and there was much custom, for people were curious. She was a foolish woman, and she talked. It was for small reason, she said, that Stefano had killed her man. She spoke with contempt of the goods which Stefano had left. They were not worth a couple of pounds, she said, over and over again. A man to be killed for a couple of pounds! that was all her cry. But she never knew what had become of things. They had been put away somewhere, and that was all she remembered. Her husband might have sold them for a trifle that

Stefano owed him, or they might have been stolen—she knew nothing—a bit of a box and a bundle of clothes, that was all, and it was all, too, that I could find out. Stefano was sent off to prison; the dead man's widow gave up this house, and people forgot the affair."

The Hindu paused and drew his chair nearer to Lindsay. His low tones sank to a whisper.

"But I did not forget. See—I have searched this house from top to bottom, they have not even known that I was in it when I was searching. The box was not here—that I soon discovered. Not until today did I know where it was. That's my story."

Lindsay drew a long breath and stared back at Lal Dass's questioning eyes.

"And I didn't know where my box was until today," he said at last. "And it was by accident that I know now. Well, I'll be getting out of this place. I ain't thin-skinned, but to sit where murders has been performed doesn't come agreeable."

"But we must first settle our business," said Lal Dass.

"Our business? I guess it's settled," said Lindsay, angrily. "The box is mine, ain't it?"

"The contents are the joint shares of three men," began the Hindu.

"Contents? You're not such an infernal fool, Mr. Dass, as to imagine that there's any contents left in it by now, are you?" said Lindsay, with a sneering laugh. "Contents, indeed!"

"The contents are today what they always were," answered Lal Dass quietly.

Lindsay's face flushed purple, changed to white, and then to purple again. His hands twitched and trembled.

"By God," he said, "If they are—why should we be—but no, it's impossible, quite impossible. In a Jew's hands, too! Why, he'd look through that there box as soon as he bought it."

"He might look through it a thousand years," said the Hindu, "but he would never discover the false bottom."

Lindsay drew a deep breath. His eyes sought Lal Dass's observant face.

"What are we to do," he whispered. "I've already frightened him with threats of the law—it may make him take the alarm and get the box away, and then swear he'd sold it."

The Hindu's face darkened.

"That was a mistake," he said. "Come, we must act to-night. He will close his shop at nine o'clock—we must be with him soon after. You are agreed? The box is to be ours, and its contents are to be shared on the old terms?"

"Yes," answered Lindsay. "But how——"

Lal Dass motioned him to silence. He rose and pointed to the door.

"Let us go somewhere where there are not even walls to overhear our words," he said. "Come, I know of a spot that will suit us."

He opened the door and led the way into the street. Outside he walked away at a brisk pace. Lindsay followed him at twenty yards' distance.

CHAPTER III

THE FOOTSTEP ON THE THRESHOLD

Mr. Aaron Josephs remained in his shop all that day, expectant of a message or communication about the brass-bound box. Now and then, when he was not otherwise engaged, he bent his gaze on the article in question, and tried to imagine some probable reason as to the sailor-man's anxiety about it. The Jew was man enough of the world to know that Lindsay's desire to gain possession of the box was not likely to spring from mere sentimental affection for it. There must be some reason for the concern which had made itself evident in the man's eager face and trembling hands. He said to himself that there was no doubt that the sailor was right, that the box had been his, and that it was within his rights in demanding its restoration to him. But that troubled Mr. Josephs very little, if it troubled him at all. He knew that possession is sometimes more than nine points of the law, and he had no more intention of surrenduring the brass-bound box to Lindsay than of presenting his entire stock-in-trade to the next passer-by. What concerned him most was the box itself. What made the man so eager to get hold of it again? What was it that he wanted the box for? Mr. Josephs asked himself these questions over and over again, and as he asked them he glanced at the box as if he were trying to pierce its wooden walls and solve the secret at a single look.

Once or twice Mr. Josephs took the box up from the shelf, where he had placed it when Lindsay and the policeman withdrew, and handled it with fingers no less inquisitive than his glances. He tapped the sides, looked curiously at the bottom, and examined the joints and corners as if he expected to find some secret spring there.

Then he remembered that when he became possessed of the box there had been a key in the lock, and that he had put it away somewhere. He began searching among the contents of a drawer under the counter, and presently found the key with a paper label attached to it. During a quiet interval of business he opened the box and looked carefully about the interior. It was quite empty, and Mr. Josephs could not perceive any sign of its ever having concealed anything valuable. It was lined with some Eastern wood, the fragrance of which made itself apparent even above the coarse odours of the oilskins hanging in the shop. But there was nothing to be learnt from staring into the box, and Mr. Josephs presently locked it up again, and put the key carefully away in his waistcoat pocket. Then thinking it wise to secure an article round which so much mystery hung, he put the box itself into the safe. It amused him to think that Lindsay would have some difficulty in getting it out of that.

Mr. Josephs closed his shop somewhat earlier than usual that evening. He lived in a stuffy room at the back of his business premises, and to this he presently repaired, and began to make ready his evening meal. While he was thus engaged, his thoughts still ran on the events of the day. He ate and drank slowly, pondering over the mystery of the box and the sailor, and when he came to the last mouthful he resolved to have another inspection of the

thing which Lindsay had betrayed such eagerness to secure. The Jew had had to deal with mysteries more than once: he was not going to be baffled by this. He cleared away the things from his supper table, turned up the gas-jet above it to a brighter glow, and fetched the brass-bound box from the safe.

Everything was very still in the house when Mr. Josephs put down the box on the table of his sitting-room. He had barred and bolted the shop door and closed the room—the noises of the street outside scarcely penetrated to his ears. It suddenly struck him with a new sense, that extraordinary quiet. He glanced at the door which led into the enclosed yard at the back of the house; that, of course, was fast, for it was rarely opened. The Jew was a man of simple tastes and habits, and contented himself with very meagre surroundings. He lived in the small room in which he now sat, and he slept in a little chamber overhead. All the rest of the house was given up to the storing of such odds and ends as had overflowed from the shop. There was no other living soul in it than himself—he was free to continue his investigations undisturbed by any one, now that the shop was closed for the night. All this he thought of as he sat down before the brass-bound box.

"I'll settle the matter once for all before I go to bed," he said to himself. "There must be something about the box that I know nothing of, or why should the sailorman be so anxious to get it? It may have papers hidden in it that are of value, or bank-notes, or something that you would like to get hold of. Perhaps there's a secret receptacle in it. There must be something—the man wouldn't be such a fool as to make such a fuss over the

thing if he hadn't some particular reason for securing it. And, of course, that reason must have been a pecuniary one. What is it but money that makes men keen about anything—what indeed?"

It seemed to Mr. Josephs that a ghostly whisper from the shadow in the rear of the parlour re-echoed the last words. He could have sworn that he heard them repeated in a thin faint whisper. He started up, looked about him, and sat down again, cursing his own fears. He had been slightly put out by the events of the day. The advent of the sailor had disturbed him, and the mystery of the brass-bound box had perplexed and annoyed him, and he felt himself trembling a little as he handled the box once more.

"Bah," he muttered, "I'm getting nervous. It's so confoundedly still in this old house. That won't do. Nerves are no good in my business, where a man's got to avoid being cheated and robbed every day of his life. Now, then, for this box."

Mr. Josephs produced a small foot rule from his inner pocket, and began to take measurements of the box with a careful air. He measured its length, and breadth, and depth, marking the figures down on a piece of paper at his elbow. As he proceeded his face grew more and more troubled, and at last he threw down the rule and pencil with an exclamation of disappointment.

"There can't be a secret drawer," he said. "It's impossible, the measurements are all against it. Measurements must be right: they can't deceive. And there's no room for— What's that?"

The Jew started from his chair, listening with the sharpness of an animal that scents danger. It seemed to him that he had caught the sound of a footstep on the

threshold without—a light footstep on the threshold of the yard door. He waited in a listening attitude, scarcely drawing his breath. Presently the sound was repeated, and then, with a suddenness that made Mr. Josephs start, there came a tap at the door, a single quiet tap, that was decisive and indicative of a resolution on the part of the person without to be admitted.

The Jew paused, considering matters. Who could it be that claimed admittance at that hour, and by that door? That door was rarely used—never, in fact, save by the old woman who came to tidy up the parlour and make the bed every morning. Who should come to it now? It seemed strange—not altogether reassuring in fact—to hear a knock at it. And yet it was easy for any one to open the yard door and walk in—there had never been a catch, much less a lock, on the yard door since Mr. Josephs' tenancy—he had not seen the use of spending money on one, seeing that the house door was well bolted and barred. It must be some foolish person who had lost his way and had strayed into the wrong yard.

All these thoughts flashed rapidly across the Jew's mind as he stood staring at the door. Suddenly the tap was repeated. There was something in it this time which suggested even more resolve on the part of the person without. The Jew hesitated—wavered—and finally went across the room and opened the door.

There was still some daylight, faded into a dim grey that matched the enclosing walls of the yard, remaining, and by its light and that of the lamp on the table Mr. Josephs found himself staring at a man. At first sight he thought this must be the sailor, but the mistake was immediately rectified in his mind by this perception of the

fact that the stranger on the threshold was small and slight, and clad in light clothes of Eastern make and texture. Mr. Josephs' eyes ran from feet to head, and rested on a coloured turban, and at sight of that he muttered an angry exclamation.

"What do you want here?" he asked impatiently.

The Hindu answered in placatory tones.

"To sell you something," he said.

"I have closed my shop an hour ago," replied the Jew. "I don't do business after business hours; go away and come in the morning."

"But in the morning I shall not be here. I shall be out in the Channel, miles away from this country. Besides, we have traded together before: surely you'll not refuse an old customer."

Mr. Josephs drew nearer, and peered closer into the man's face. He stepped back into the room, inviting the other to follow.

"Why couldn't you come sooner?" he asked, still ungracious and out of temper. "Can't you let a man rest himself at the end of his day's labour? What is it?"

"Two or three small stones," answered the Hindu, who had closed the door after him, and now advanced to the table. "Something like those you bought from me a little time ago, Mr. Josephs."

"Humph," said Mr. Josephs, "I did badly with them. I did indeed. I made little profit on that matter. However, let's see what you've got."

The Hindu produced a small canvas bag from some secret recess of his clothing. He untied the strings with deliberate fingers, looking steadily the while at Mr. Josephs. Then he shook out of the loose folds of the bag

three small diamonds which glittered brightly as the rays of the lamp caught them. The Jew bent down to the table to examine the wares thus offered at closer quarters. Lal Dass remained in his erect position, imperturbable and watchful. His keen stealthy eyes turned from the brass-bound box to the foot-rule, and from the foot-rule to the sheet of paper on which Mr. Josephs had jotted down his figures. When the Hindu's eyes rested on the latter he smiled a little, but his face was grave and inscrutable as ever when the Jew looked up from the diamonds.

"Well," said Mr. Josephs, "how much this time? It's out of my regular hours, and I ought not to do business at all in this way, but as it's you, and you're going away—shall we say the same price as last time?"

"These stones are better than those I brought you last time," said Lal Dass gently. "I must have more—much more."

Mr. Josephs waved his hands with an expressive gesture.

"But I do not keep so much money in the house!" he exclaimed. "And besides the stones are not worth more than those you last offered me. In any case, if you are sailing tonight, I have not the money in the house. I will give you what I gave before, and half the amount in cash, and half in a promissory note to be redeemed when you next come to Plymouth."

"Very well," answered the Hindu, "if it must be so."

"I will fetch the money from my safe," said Mr. Josephs. His good temper had returned with the delight of bargaining, and he had got good value for the money he was about to lay out.

"Sit down a moment," he added, gathering up the dia-

monds. "I shall not be gone five minutes; my safe is in the shop."

Lal Dass sat down and looked about him. His eyes finally rested on the brass-bound box. His eyes were still regarding it when Mr. Josephs re-entered the parlour. The Hindu nodded at the box.

"That is a pretty piece of work which you have there," he said. "It is, I think, the workmanship of some countryman of my own. If it is for sale, Mr. Josephs, I will buy it from you."

The Jew looked at Lal Dass with something like suspicion.

"You are the second that has wanted to buy it today," he said. "No, no, I am not selling that box. It is a magic box; there's something mysterious about it."

"Ah, a secret drawer or receptacle no doubt," said the Hindu unconcernedly, "They all have."

"Do you think so? But, oh, I have been much concerned about that box. It seemed to me that there might be a secret drawer, and I tried to find it. But I could find nothing."

"No, it had been strange if you could," answered Lal Dass. "Is that the money you hold in your hand, Mr. Josephs?"

"And the note payable on demand," answered the Jew, handing a roll of notes and a slip of blue paper to the Hindu. "I will trade with you at any time—I hope you will bring me back something good next trip. But this box? You think it is likely there is a secret receptacle in it?"

"Nothing so probable," said Lal Dass, stowing away the money in his breast pocket. "Oh, nothing so probable."

"But I have measured," said the Jew. "See, here are

the figures—you cannot mistake figures. There is the length, breadth, depth—you will perceive that there is no room for any secret place of any size."

Lal Dass smiled enigmatically.

"That is where the artificer's skill is shown," he said. "Ah, they are very skilful artificers in my country. See here—this is a little toy I picked up in Benares. How small it is—and yet there is a secret receptacle in it wherein you could pack a dozen stones of considerable size. Try it, Mr. Josephs."

The Jew took the article which Lal Dass offered him. It was to outward appearance a rounded piece of ivory, about two and a half inches in length and an inch and a quarter in circumference, and not unlike the cases in which ladies carry needles of a large size. At one end there are the smallest aperture conceivable; so small, indeed, that it seemed impossible for even the finest needle to penetrate its orifice. At the other end the little curiosity was rounded off to a blunt finish. Mr. Josephs turned it over and over in his hands admiringly.

"There is no doubt some secret opening in this," he said.

"Just so," said Lal Dass, watching him carefully. "A secret spring, as you say. But where?"

"I used to be good at finding this sort of thing out," said the Jew. "You usually press the wrong place—and then another wrong place—and then you get to the right place—and, ah——"

The ivory casket dropped sharply from his hand to the table cloth, and he looked ruefully at the ball of his right thumb and began rubbing it with the fingers of his left hand.

"What is it?" asked Lal Dass.

"Something pricked me sharply," answered Mr. Josephs. "Something that seemed to shoot out of this tiny hole when I pressed the rounded end. It is a trick, I suppose."

"A little trick," replied the Hindu. "It gives a mere pin prick, but see, this is the secret spring. Look."

He took the casket from the table and gave it an almost imperceptible touch. One end flew open, revealing a hollow cavity.

"That is very clever," said the Jew, with genuine admiration. "I dare say that little thing is helpful to you in carrying precious stones. Yes, no one would readily discover the trick, and perhaps they might get pricked as I did."

"It does not pain?" inquired Lal Dass.

"No, a mere prick. I do not feel it now. But look at my box—perhaps you can find out its secret. I will sit down—I feel a little tired."

Mr. Josephs sat back in his easy chair as the Hindu bent over the table. Something had made him feel a little sleepy—his head nodded once or twice. He bestirred himself with an effort, opening his eyes wide. Lal Dass was bending over the box; his lithe fingers caressed its corners. Mr. Josephs felt very comfortable; there was a nice warm glow in his veins. He closed his eyes again, and his chin dropped towards his chest.

The Hindu looked up. The Jew lay back, head drooping forward, arms extended along his sides, legs stretched straight out across the hearthrug. A slight gentle breathing sounded from his lips: his chest rose and fell in regular movements. Lal Dass watched him for a moment. Then

he quietly rose, and walking across to him, lifted one of his arms and let it drop. He raised an eyelid and laid a finger on the pupil. The Jew remained motionless. Then Lal Dass went over to the door, opened it, and gave a low peculiar cry. Out of the gloom of the yard came Lindsay, and the two walked into the parlour. Lal Dass pointed first to the box; then to the motionless figure of the Jew.

"Are the things in there?" asked Lindsay, looking at the box.

"Yes, take the box, and wait for me outside. Do not attempt to escape me, friend Lindsay; I have eyes in the back of my head."

"You're a devil," said the seaman. He lifted up the brass-bound box, and hid it beneath his rough jacket. He went towards the door and turned. "And you," he said questioningly.

Lal Dass smiled evilly, and motioned him away. When Lindsay had passed the door he turned to the figure in the chair. For a moment he deliberated: then from beneath his coat he drew forth a cord of silk, soft and strong, and went over to the Jew. Josephs made no motion as the cord of death wound itself subtly round his neck.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEAMAN'S KNIFE

LINDSAY, waiting in the yard outside, with the brass-bound box clutched tightly under his arm, shivered with a nameless fear as he thought of what must be going on in the Jew's parlour. He had caught a glimpse of the silk cord as Lal Dass slowly drew it from his waist, and he knew what it portended. He had no very strong views of the sacredness of life, for long years of knocking about in all quarters of the world had made him little better than a callous brute; but, in spite of his savagery, he could not help feeling a qualm of repulsion at the mental picture forming itself before him. He saw the Hindu's lithe, brown fingers adjusting the noose around the victim's neck. He saw the cord being drawn tighter and tighter. Bah, he said to himself; it was enough to make a man sick. He drew closer to the wall—there was a deep silence all about him—he thought that the thing would have been less repulsive if there had been a cry, or a scream, or the sounds of a struggle. But there was no sound from the house—the tragedy was played out to its end in grim silence.

Lal Dass's face was expressionless when at last he came outside.

He locked the door of the house behind him, and bestowed the key somewhere about his person. Then, stealing to Lindsay's side with noiseless step, he motioned the sailor towards the street at the rear of the house.

"Go first," he said. "When you get into the street, make for Devonport by the quietest ways you can think of. Do not forget that my eyes will not leave you. I shall be close behind."

Lindsay whispered some unintelligible curse as he obeyed orders. He went quietly out of the yard and slunk along the by-streets. Ere long he heard Lal Dass's voice at his shoulder.

"Do not walk like that: you are going on your way as if you had robbed somebody and feared to meet a policeman. Go boldly, like a man that fears nothing—boldly, but by quiet ways."

Lindsay growled, savage as a dog that has been beaten, but that dares not disobey. Instead of slinking along by the wall, however, he walked boldly in the middle of the pavement. So, with the Hindu sauntering gently behind, he went along until the two were in Devonport, with a crowd of sailors, marines, and their attendant satellites, around them.

"This way," whispered Lal Dass suddenly. "Turn to your right—follow me down the passage. Remember that I can see from behind."

Lindsay turned sharply. The Hindu had stepped into a dark opening, unlighted by any lamp, and suggestive of nothing but ambush and possible murder. As the Hindu's light clothes became faint in the gloom, Lindsay stopped.

"Here," he said hoarsely, "I ain't agoing no further down this here passage. Where might it lead to? What call have we to go down it for? I'm agoing back. D'ye hear."

"Silence, fool," whispered Lal Dass. "It leads to my lodging. There's nothing to fear. Have you not sufficient

confidence in me to follow through a dark passage? You are behind. It is I should be afraid of you."

"Where are we going?" asked Lindsay gruffly.

"To my lodging room, where nobody can disturb us. It is a quiet place. We can then decide on our plans. Fool, do you not see that we are wasting time?" said the Hindu, his imperturbability giving way to impatience. "Come on."

"If there's any trick about it," said Lindsay slowly, and still suspicious of his companion, "I'm not without means of defence, Mr. Lal Dass, and I'm an ugly one to tackle——"

"Are you coming?" said Lal Dass, "or are you going to waste time? See, I will walk in front the whole way. You may keep your pistol or your knife to my back if you please until we reach my room—come."

"Go on," growled Lindsay, "but remember—no hanky-panky work with me!"

The Hindu glided along the dark passage, with Lindsay closely following at his heel, until they came into a small square, lighted only by a feeble gleam of candle light from a window in one corner. The sailor looked about him with manifest disfavour, and his right hand assumed a firmer grip of the sheath-knife at his belt. He stood close behind Lal Dass while the latter unlocked a door but instead of following him within he hung doubtfully upon the threshold.

"Strike a match and let's see what sort of a hole I'm going into," he said. "I like to see a bit before me in strange places."

Lal Dass responded at once. He lighted a match and pointed to a door on the right hand side of the narrow passage in which they stood.

"That is my room," he said. "There are no stairs to climb, you see. Come in."

Lindsay still hung back.

"How do I know that there isn't a round dozen of you ready to scrag me in there?" he said. "Look ye here, Mr. Lal Dass, do you go into that there room of yours and light up, and let me look through the window to satisfy myself. I like to take precautions, I do."

"Post yourself at the window, then," said Lal Dass, unlocking his own door. "You are a suspicious man. I trust you better than you trust me."

"That's as may be," growled Lindsay, "you've better reason."

He pressed his face to the dirty window panes as Lal Dass lighted a candle in the room within. Lindsay saw nothing to excite suspicion—the room was squalid, dirty, uncomfortable; there was no furniture in it behind which a man could hide. A table stood in the centre of the floor, a chair was placed close by; in one corner was a bed. Lindsay was satisfied. He slipped in at the front door, turned into the room, and placed the box on the table.

"Better draw the blind," he said, nodding at the window. "We don't want nobody overlooking our proceedings."

"Certainly," said Lal Dass, "and we will shut the door also. Our conversation must not be overheard, any more than our proceedings must be overlooked."

"What's the first move?" growled Lindsay, watching Lal Dass with furtive and suspicious glances. "No time to waste, is there?"

"We will waste no time," answered the Hindu. "First let us see that our property is safe. The Jew man had not

discovered the spring—he was puzzling his brain over its whereabouts. And yet it is so very simple when you know it. There!"

He had caressed the box as he spoke with a gentle pressure of his slim hands, and suddenly a sharp click sounded, and he drew out of the bottom a shallow tray.

Lindsay's eyes flashed, and his jaw dropped with a sudden gape of surprised pleasure—the tray glittered with the radiance of a necklet or girdle of magnificent diamonds, whose brilliancy caught and threw back the feeble rays of the candle.

"Safe, by Heaven!" said Lindsay under his breath. He drew out his coarse red handkerchief and wiped the sweat away from his forehead.

"I was afraid that something had happened to 'em," he muttered. "I didn't rightly reckon that we should handle 'em again."

"They are all here," said the Hindu, looking up from his examination of the glittering stones. "Sixty-three in all. Is that not right?"

"There was sixty-three stones in the necklace," answered Lindsay with slow emphasis. "One and twenty apiece there was. Now that Stefano is in quod I reckon he don't count. That'll make thirty-two, or thereabouts, for you and me apiece—and what are we going to do with 'em?"

"Leave that to me," said Lal Dass. "We must turn them to the best advantage."

"We've risked something for 'em," muttered Lindsay. "If I'd forseen all that's happened since we pinched 'em I don't know that I should have had aught to do with it. There was a shipwreck—that was bad enough, and like-

wise the worry about that infernal box, not knowing what had become of it. Then there was starvation—which was worse, a man not being built to go with an empty belly for days together. And now there's a bloody murder——"

Lal Dass held up a warning hand.

"Hush," he said, "some words should not be said. Come, let us put these stones up, and make away with the box. That out of the way there will be no link between us and the Jew man."

"Let's have a squint at 'em first." said Lindsay. He sprang to his feet and came over to Lal Dass's side, and bent over the table to stare at the gems. "Mighty fine shiners!" he exclaimed. "Lord! they must be worth a pot o' money. I wish we had it all turned into golden sovereigns."

"That shall come," said Lal Dass. He produced a small bag, and began placing the necklet in it, counting the stones again as he did so. Lindsay watched him, standing erect at his side.

A sudden temptation flashed into Lindsay's mind. He looked down and saw the Hindu's back and shoulders, slight, lithe, almost fragile, presented to him as Lal Dass busied himself with the gems. How easy it would be to drive his knife through the thin clothes and the brown skin beneath into the man's heart. He saw the exact spot just there—a little out of the way of the shoulder blade that made an outline under the coat. It would be done in a second . . . his fingers stole gently to the knife at his belt.

". . . Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen," counted Lal Dass in low, purring tones. "Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twent——." The knife flashed into the

air and buried itself, backed by the full strength of the sailor's heavy arm, in the Hindu's body. Lal Dass groaned deeply and sunk over the table, covering the glittering stones, and striking the brass-bound box. A spurt of blood shot up through the edges of the wound that gaped round the knife, and began slowly to dye the clothing.

Lindsay stepped back, holding his breath. His eyes were fixed on the body with a fearful fascination. Unconsciously he threw himself in an attitude of defence, as though he expected the dead man to revivify suddenly and leap upon him. Not until a moment had gone by did he relax. Then it was with a watchful slowness, as if he were not yet certain that the blow had done its work. At last, with a long sigh, he moved, shaking himself, and stretched forth a hand to touch his victim. He put a finger on the Hindu's shoulder: it seemed to him that the flesh was already stiffening in the embrace of death. He drew his hand hastily away and looked about him with a vague stare of wonder at his surroundings. So far, he scarcely comprehended that he had just killed the man to whom he had been talking only a few minutes earlier.

The sharp cry of a cat in the square without aroused him from his partial stupefaction, and he suddenly woke into feverish energy. He snatched the little bag from the dead man's fingers and began to hurry the gems into it. When he had secured them he tied up the mouth of the bag and crammed the bag into his pocket. Then he turned to the door, but on the threshold looked back. The knife! He must not leave it there—nor the brass-bound box—they were links in the chain that must not be forged—he must take away both of them. He drew near the body step by step. The stain on the back of the dead man's coat was

widening—he wondered what would happen if he withdrew the knife. Would the blood spurt over him?—it would not do to be marked with blood—people had such suspicious minds and keen eyes.

At last, with an effort, he laid hold of the knife and withdrew it from the body with averted eyes. He held it gingerly and looked round for the box. That stood open on the table, with the shallow tray which formed its bottom lying at his side. He slipped the tray into position again, and dropped the knife into the box. Then he huddled the box under his coat and made for the door.

He turned once more and looked back at the dead man lying doubled up across the table. The light still sputtered and guttered at his side. Holding the door in one hand, Lindsay stretched forward and blew it out. A great horror came over him as the darkness fell, and he opened the door wide and fled into the square, and up the long dark passage. His ears seemed to ring with the curious sound which the knife had made as it was plunged into the dead man's back.

The lights in the streets revived him. There was a certain friendliness in their glare. There were not many people about, and he half paused under a lamp-post and looked at his hands. There was no blood on them, nor on his clothes, so far as he could see, and he heaved an unconscious sigh of relief. He walked on, farther and farther away from the scene of his crime, and at last, coming to a public-house, he walked boldly in and called for liquor.

CHAPTER V

THE HUT ON THE MOOR

THERE were very few people standing in the bar into which Lindsay turned, and none of them gave him a second glance. To them he looked an ordinary seaman who was a little down on his luck, and if they wondered why he held his coat somewhat tightly pressed to his body they soon explained their wonder by the surmise that the man wore no shirt beneath it, and was ashamed of his poverty. As for Lindsay, he paid no heed to the folk standing at his side. He gave a sharp glance at the clock, which ticked solemnly above the bright array of glasses and bottles, and noticed that its hands pointed to half-past ten. It was not yet twelve hours since he had first caught sight of the brass-bound box lying in the dealer's window, but much had happened during that time, and now the box lay under his arm carefully hidden beneath the old coat;—and that reminded him, he must rid himself of it. The box was a link between him and certain events of which he had no wish to think, now that they were over and done with, and it must be destroyed. He must get rid of it at once.

These thoughts flitted ghost-like through Lindsay's brain as the barman drew the pint of ale which the seaman had ordered. As it was set down before him in a pewter measure, Lindsay became conscious of a terrible thirst. He lifted the pewter measure and poured half its contents down his throat at one gulp. He wondered how

he had found words wherein to ask for the ale—so dry and parched did his mouth seem to him. He finished the ale and felt better, and he was half minded to call for another pint, but reflected that he had work to do, and had best keep his head cool. He might have another pint of ale—two perhaps, or even three—or something stronger than ale even, when he had finished his work; but the work he had to do must be done before anything else. He must make himself safe—safe.

Lindsay went out of the tavern, still clutching the brass-bound box under his coat. He was in a low part of the town, and he went forward plunging still deeper into obscure nooks and corners. He wanted to get down to the water side, somewhere or anywhere, and get rid of his burden. It seemed to him that when he was once free of that a great weight would be lifted off his mind. He said to himself that he must find some quiet corner wherein to prepare the thing—he must have stones wherewith to weigh it—it would never do for the box to float away, only to be picked up perhaps by some suspicious boat's crew on the Hamoaze, or handed over to the police. He must sink it—deep, deep where no eye would see it more.

It was a long time before Lindsay came to a spot sufficiently quiet for his purpose, but at last he found himself in the angle of a high wall and free from observation. He had picked up two or three stones as he went along, and these he packed into the box when he had drawn it from his coat. In doing so his fingers touched the knife—it was still wet and sticky, and he shivered at the feel of it. He closed the box hurriedly, and wound it about with a piece of strong twine, which he produced from his pocket. Then he replaced the box beneath his

coat, and went forward again, always choosing the quietest ways. As the night wore toward midnight the folk in the streets grew less and less in numbers, and at last Lindsay found himself crossing alleys and courts, wherein only a faint light here and there showed any sign of human life. He was nearing the water now, and, as the first gleam of it caught his eye through an opening in the houses, he turned and looked behind him as though he feared that some one had dogged his footsteps. There was a patch of faint light here and there in the streets, lying in triangular wedges between the gas lamps, and it seemed to him once that he saw the figure of Lal Dass gliding stealthily from one to the other. He paused and looked again, and his heart beat fiercely against his breast. He strained his eyes. Surely that was a figure stealing after him! Could it be that Lal Dass had revived, and was stalking him to his death? Those Hindus had marvellous powers, he had heard folk say, and it might be—but there he cursed himself for a fool, remembering how straight and true the knife had gone home, and how motionless Lal Dass had lain across the table.

At length he reached the place he had kept in his mind's eye ever since he stepped out of the tavern—a quiet pool in the angle made by a pier which stretches out into the Hamoaze. There was no one about, and his preparations were quickly made. He had left one end of the coil of twine loose, and he let it run lightly through his fingers as the brass-bound box sunk into the black water. A sudden fear lest the string should be too long and remain floating on the surface seized him, but he breathed a sigh of relief on seeing the end curl and twist, and then disappear in the wake of the box. He stood

erect at the water's side—it seemed to him that now nothing could touch him. But once more that terrible thirst was hot and dry in his throat, and his tongue craved for drink. Then he remembered that he had heard the clocks strike eleven as he walked along, and cursed his fate that it was now too late to obtain more liquor. For that he must wait until morning.

He was now in the neighbourhood of Ford, and he began to wonder how and where he was to pass the night. Back to the lodging which had sheltered him the past few days he dared not go—it was his idea to say farewell to Plymouth for ever. But where was he to go? The precious stones for which he had played a desperate game were in his pocket now, and there was no one to dispute possession with him. But he must turn them into money—and where was he going to do that? Come—he must think these matters over carefully. He proceeded to think as he walked slowly forward. Ere very long the police would know that two men had been murdered that night in Plymouth, and they would want to know all about the matter. Was it possible that they would connect him with the deaths of the Jew and the Hindu? He wanted to think, but it seemed somehow no easy thing to think seriously. To begin with, one policeman, at any rate, knew that there was a mystery lying around Josephs, the brass-bound box, and himself. The police would find Josephs dead, and they would also find the box gone. Naturally they would think that he, Lindsay, had murdered the Jew for the box. But also they would find Lal Dass murdered. Would they connect the two things? If they did, Lindsay saw some slight chance for himself. But if they put down the murder of the Hindu to some

other person unknown, and concentrated their attention on finding the man who had declared his intention of securing the brass-bound box from Josephs' keeping—what then? The mere notion was appalling—the sweat broke out on Lindsay's forehead, and he glanced fearfully over his shoulder, as though he expected to see the arm of the law stretched out to arrest him.

There was but one thing to be done—he must go right away until the thing blew over, or was less noised abroad. And he must go by road; he dare not risk showing himself at the railway station.

He knew the lie of the land pretty well—he would go off into Dartmoor and hide himself there for a day or two, and gradually work his way across country to London or Bristol—he was not yet sure which. So he turned his face to the north-east, and plodded steadily onward through the dark night. Now and then his fingers sought the bag in which he had carried away the diamonds. Now and then he paused to listen, fancying that he heard footsteps hurrying after him. Bit by bit the town and its out-works dropped away behind him, and he came into the open country. The night wind blew cheerfully against his cheek and refreshed him, and his mind, until then clouded over by gloomy thoughts, began to take a brighter view of matters.

Lindsay went forward along the high road while the summer night almost imperceptibly faded into the first faint flush of an early summer morning. He walked for the most part with his head bent, but, as the first shaft of light came stealing over the tops of the great Tors, he looked up and saw that daylight was coming back to the world. Already he had walked some distance—Tor Grove

and Widey Court and Knackers Knowle lay behind him, and, as the light increased, he saw in front of him the wayside inn which stands at the four cross roads between Tamerton Foliott and Plym Bridge. It was still much too early for anybody to be stirring at the inn, but Lindsay dare not pass it lest he should by any chance be seen and wondered at. He turned away to the right, following the groves and coppices down to Bickleigh Vale. It was bright morning by the time he had hidden himself in its luxuriant foliage, and all around him the birds were breaking out into a chorus of wild unrestrained song.

He sat down on a fallen tree and thought his position over. Suddenly he leapt to his feet and went farther into the wood. His sharp eye had caught sight of some recently-felled timber with fresh chippings about it, and he concluded that, ere long, woodcutters would appear on the scene and begin their day's toil. He had no mind to be discovered there, and he went hurriedly away.

Presently Lindsay came to the railway line, which runs from Marsh Mills through Bickleigh Vale towards Yelverton. He stood against the railings and looked across the great Saugh Wood, and it struck him that the thickness of the trees there would afford him better protection. So he crossed the line, waded through the river beyond, and plunged into the depths of the wood. The morning dew was lying heavily on everything, and ere long he was drenched and sodden with it. He turned to the left, and was soon in the midst of trees that almost touched each other. The air grew hot, stifling; Lindsay's brow streamed with sweat, and he began to pant with the exertion of toiling forward through that desert of green to which no breath of wind seemed to penetrate.

Something seemed to drive him forward through the wood without rest or stoppage. He would gladly have sat down and rested his limbs, which were now beginning to feel fatigued after his long tramp, but whenever he thought of doing so a feeling of fear urged him onward. Now and then he fancied that he heard voices; then the crackling of a twig caused his heart to bound with a wild fear that pursuers were on his track. His eyes naturally turned right and left, seeking for sight of danger, and he himself began to feel like a hunted thing, though he told himself over and over again that the fear was all imagination and not real. But still he went onward.

He suddenly paused on finding himself on the edge of the wood and hearing voices outside. Advancing cautiously, he looked out from the last fringe of trees and saw that he was near Bickleigh bridge, and that the voices were those of some country folk going to their work. Just then the strokes of a clock sounded from somewhere ahead. He counted six of them, and remembered that it was twelve hours since he had tasted food. He was getting faint and hungry, and his appetite sharpened with every moment.

When the country folk had gone by, Lindsay emerged from the wood, and, having crossed the high road, set off towards the Tors. Once he turned aside into Saugh Prior, and bought bread and cheese at the little shop, and took a big draught of ale at the inn. He knew that they regarded him with surprise at both places, but he was too thirsty and hungry to mind that. He ate and drank, and then purchased more food and a bottle of ale, and carried this supply away with him.

All that morning Lindsay toiled on—up Saugh Moor

over the shoulder of Great Trowlesworthy Tor to Shavercome Head, and thence across Longcombe and Erme towards Green Hill. The sun was blinding hot, but he passed on. Once or twice he paused to take a drink from his bottle—the ale was warm and insipid, but without it he would have been dead beat, he said to himself.

At noon he came upon a half ruined hut, standing in the middle of a patch of desolate moorlands on the north of Green Hill. He entered it and looked about him. It was cool and shady, and there was sufficient bracken and furze stored within it to make a soft couch. Lindsay suddenly recognized that he was tired out and must rest. He could not go a yard further until he had rested. He flung himself down on the dried bracken and in a moment was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN HUNT

LINDSAY was dead beat. Stolid, brutal and unemotional as he was, the events of the preceding day and night had wrought on his feelings, and the long tramp through the woods and over the Tors had exhausted him physically. He slept on and on, and the afternoon wore away towards evening, and still he slumbered heavily. The sun set behind the western moorlands and cast strange shadows on the ridges and Tors, but Lindsay saw nothing of it. He lay on the heap of bracken, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

While it was still broad daylight, and the sun was still gilding the tops of the trees, a figure came moving slowly across the landscape from the northward. It came in a strange fashion, now appearing in full view for a time, then disappearing altogether, and cropping up again in another place. From afar off it looked like a blot of grey moving across the golden brow of the hillsides. Sometimes it moved at a rapid pace—that was when the ground was level: sometimes it came forward painfully and slowly—that was when the ground was rough and broken. But slowly or quickly the progress never stayed; it came on, a moving point across the silent waste of moor and fell.

Had Lindsay been awake and watchful he would have perceived that, as the figure drew nearer to the hut on the side of Green Hill, it resolved itself into that of a man. The man was running like a hunted beast, and every now

and then his head turned over his shoulder. The noise of his panting breath came with a slight breeze as he made a new effort at the foot of the slope.

Lindsay might have seen, too, that the man was a convict, wearing the ugly prison dress with its stampings of the broad arrow making it still more ugly. But Lindsay slept; he heard and saw nothing.

The convict came on, labouring painfully up the hill. A little, well-built man, with a deeply lined face, and dark desperate eyes—his hair, despite the scissors of the prison barber, curled in little rings about his temples and ears. Not an Englishman—one could tell that by his gestures, his quick turn of eye and hand, and by the olive complexion shaded by the pallor of prison life. He came on, bit by bit, glancing now and then over his shoulder in the direction of Princetown, lying far off there in the haze and shimmer of the setting sun, and every time he looked back he set his teeth together with more desperate resolution, and went on his way more doggedly.

In the hut Lindsay's heavy slumbers turned to troubled dreams. The exhaustion was wearing itself out, and the brain was beginning to reassert itself. He dreamt that he was running, on, on, on, somewhere out of reach of something that tracked him down. He was not sure what it was that pursued him—dogs, men, wild beasts, demons. But something was in pursuit, and he must fly. He sped forward with the speed of deadly fear, but already he could feel the hot breath, and hear the pantings and growlings and screamings of the things behind. He stirred, moaning in his sleep, and tossed about restlessly.

At that moment the convict came toiling up the hillside to the ruined hut. He had seen it from afar off, and had

made for it with the intention of resting in it for a while ere he went onward. In his mind, too, there was some faint hope that he might there find something that would further his escape—old garments, cast away by the shepherds, a piece of sacking, anything that would hide or replace the damning broad arrow. If only he could get away to a haunt of his own in Plymouth—a place that he knew and could depend on—all might go well, but how was he to get there in that hateful dress? All day, since he had managed to slip away from the guard's notice, he had run along by the wildest ways he could find, and so far he had been successful. But now he was in sore need of rest—the windings in and out by the Blackbrook and the Swincombe, the scramblings over rough places on the Tors, the struggling through Fox Tor Mire, the continual advance in the burning sunlight of a hot midsummer day, had tired him out. As he came to the hut he looked around, searching the landscape with desperate eyes. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing in the way of human life to be seen in all that wide expanse of waste and moor. It was desert swept by the fading sunlight.

The convict stole up to the unshuttered window place of the hut, and, grasping the rough lintel with his fingers, drew his eyes to a level with it. For a moment he gazed within; then he dropped back and stood meditating with a new light in his eyes and a new fierceness in his heart. He had seen something that gave him new hope.

The picture which had presented itself to him in the partial gloom of the ruined hut was one that would have made no impression on any other man. He had seen a man lying asleep on a rough couch of furze and bracken—a man who was evidently a fugitive or a tramp, so unkempt

and travel-stained was his clothing. He lay with his back to the window, and now and then he moved and groaned in his sleep. But the convict had not seen his face, his eyes regarded nothing but his clothes.

To the convict, these clothes, poor and worn as they were, meant everything—freedom, liberty, life itself. However ragged they might be they were not stamped with the hateful badge of penal servitude. In them a man might pass other men unchallenged—in the garb of shame which he wore that was impossible. He must have these clothes.

He climbed up to the window again, and again looked in on the sleeper. Lindsay's sleep had changed again, from the restlessness of dreams to the soundness of slumber; he lay still, so still that he might have been dead.

The convict hesitated no longer. He stepped down from the window and looked about him with fierce, resolute eyes. A little distance away lay a stout piece of wood that had once formed the lintel of a doorway. The convict went over and picked it up. There was a strong iron staple firmly fixed in one end of it and he examined that with determined fingers. Then he balanced the thing in his hands, and when he was satisfied with the swing of it he turned towards the door of the hut.

It was gloomy and silent within: there was scarcely the sound of the sleeping man's breathing. He lay face downward on the bracken, his head half resting in the crook of one arm, his whole attitude that of profound unconsciousness. The convict measured the swing of his rude weapon carefully. He swung the wood up once, twice, before he brought the iron staple down with a crashing force direct upon the sleeping man's head.

Under the weight of that blow the skull seemed to crack and crumble up like the shell of an egg, and the body, answering to the thrill, drew itself up with a writhing motion that suggested the convulsions of a creeping thing crushed upon a garden walk.

The murderer stared half fascinated, and swung up his weapon again, ready for another blow. The body arched itself, quivered, and relaxed, and the hands, faintly plucking at nothing, dropped nervelessly. Then, growing accustomed to the gloom, the convict saw that his blow had smashed the top and back of the head to an indefinite mass. He drew nearer and gazed at his work—that one terrible blow had done all. He drew his breath sharply between his teeth, making a low hissing sound, and presently he put out his foot and touched the body with his toe.

Suddenly the convict was filled with a startling fury. He sprang upon the corpse and began to tear the clothes from it. There was a gaping red seam in the dark hair—it would not do to have blood on the clothes. He tore away at the travel-stained garments as if they had been priceless treasures.

At last he had divested the body of everything, and, with an equally feverish rapidity, he proceeded to strip himself. He flung the prison garb upon the corpse, not out of his regard for it, but because he wished to rid himself of the sight of both clothes and body. When he had completely unrobed he proceeded to assume the dead man's clothing, even to the stockings and boots. This done he felt safer, and he put his hand in the pockets of the trousers in search of anything that might be there.

The murderer's left hand encountered a small leather

bag, the right a few coins. He drew out these finds simultaneously, and stared first at the money. A sovereign, two half-crowns, two or three shillings, and some coppers. Why, it was a fortune! Now for the little bag; what did that contain? He untied the string and shook out the contents into his open palm. A sharp exclamation of astonishment broke from him as the gems caught the fading sunlight. The convict knew diamonds when he saw them, and he knew, too, that he had seen these particular ones before. His mind went back to the days when he, and John Lindsay, and the Hindu, Lal Dass, had planned and executed the daring robbery that made them owners of the stones he now stared at. Yes, they were the same. He counted them over rapidly; sixty-three in all. How on earth had they come here after all that had taken place? He suddenly thrust the stones back into the pocket and rushed to the dead man's side. He turned the body over and stared at the face, and leaped away in sheer fright. It was Lindsay—he had killed his brother thief.

Vassalli looked round him. It seemed to him that Lal Dass might be lurking near at hand—Lal Dass, subtle as a snake, more to be feared than a cobra. The thought of him roused the murderer to action. The thing was done now, and there was nothing better than to hide it. He hastily thrust the body deeper into the shade, covered it over with the prison dress, and heaped furze and bracken over everything. As he worked his mind worked too. At last by the strangest of chances the diamonds were his. He had killed two men for them, and they were his at last.

He was about to leave the hut when a new thought occurred to him. His hand, searching the pockets of the

dead man's coat, encountered a box of matches. To act on the thought was the affair of a second. He struck a light, stooped down, and set fire to the dry bracken in several places. The flames ran crackling about the floor, and a thick smoke arose and curled towards the window place.

Vassalli quitted the hut. For a moment he lingered outside. A slight breeze was springing up with the coming twilight, and the blaze of the dry stuff inside the hut was being fanned into a persistent roar. He glanced within: already the place was a roar and rattle of flame. He said to himself that the fire would do its work well. He turned away, intent now on final escape.

Suddenly Vassalli paused. Below him on his left, advancing along the road that winds beneath Ryder's Hill towards Buckfastleigh Moor, he saw men riding on horses. He caught the gleam of steel, coming and going, now and then. Vassalli's heart filled with rage and anger —he was followed. He turned hastily to the right, only to catch sight of more men, armed and mounted, coming along the track from Erme Head towards Quickbean Hill. At that he stood, wondering which way to go. He turned, facing northward, and, as he turned, he saw a party of warders advancing up the long slope from Anne Head towards the spot where he lingered.

A great tongue of flame shot out through the window of the hut and flared up into the sky. The men coming up the slope saw it and stared in its direction. They saw Vassalli outlined against the sky, and one of them shouted to the others. At the same moment the men on the road by Ryder's Hill caught sight of him too, and one fired a shot as signal to the search party. The men coming

from Erme Head heard it and halted—there were now three sides of the land cut off from him.

Vassalli turned southward and fled in the direction of Quickbean Hill. He saw some broken ground, where he hoped horses could not follow—he saw country beyond where there appeared to be the chance of a hiding place.

He ran with all the instinct of despair. He forgot that he had changed his prison dress—he forgot that nothing so betrayed him as his flight. All that he wished for was to run, run, run, until he had out-distanced or outwitted his pursuers. He ran forward blindly, desperately.

The men on the roads turned their horses into the moor, evidently desirous of cutting off his flight. Now they lost him as he ran into some gully, or was hidden by some knoll, but he reappeared again, battling on for the broken ground ahead. When the men on the left lost sight of him, those on the right kept him in view, and presently the men in the rear came hurrying up the slope by the burning hut, and had a full view of the fugitive as he ran. Vassalli turned and saw them, and his heart burst with rage and fear. He ran on, cursing them and himself, and his folly in delaying his flight even to get rid of the prison clothes, and while he ran his pursuers forced him into their net.

It seemed to him at last that all was blood about him. There was blood in his eyes and mouth, blood in the sky and on the earth. His breath came and went in fierce sobs: his heart beat like a hammer; some dead weight pressed itself remorselessly upon his brain; his tongue thrust itself through his baked lips. But he struggled on and on. He knew that he was running into a V, with enemies riding along its lines, and enemies forcing him

down its centre, and the rage in his heart grew fierce, as he recognized that he had no chance—it was all over.

But he would try one more burst for freedom. In front of him the ground rose sharply to a pile of rocks—if he could gain those he might find some hole wherein to burrow until night had fallen and escape was easier.

He darted up the slope with a last effort, winding his way between rocks and boulders, where horses could not easily follow. But the mounted warders were close behind, and two of them had unslung their rifles and were taking careful aim. There was a sharp report, the echo rolled away, crackling through the tors and vales, and Vassalli bounded and fell, a panting heap on the grass.

He was up again—and running. He could no longer run straight—he ran from side to side—his arms clutched at the air. Now his eyes saw nothing; everything swam in blood, he tottered and fell, and again staggered to his feet and went on. The top of the rocks were close at hand: his feet stumbled at the first fissure. He felt himself going—it was over. He drew himself up against the skyline, and the warders following him behind hesitated. Vassalli turned and saw them. A sudden gleam of malice shot through his mind. He drew out the diamonds and dropped them quietly into a deep, dark fissure at his feet. Then he seemed to crumble up like a broken thing, and the men watching him from behind saw his figure sway and stagger until it suddenly dropped in a lifeless heap.

EPISODE THE SECOND

THE WARDERS AND THE WATCHMEN

CHAPTER I

THINGS THAT GLITTERED

THE warders, seeing Vassalli stagger and fall, drew near the pile of rocks with leisurely movements. It was enough for them to know that the progress of his flight had been definitely arrested—whether the convict was dead or not was a matter in which none of them took more than a professional interest. The two men who had fired upon their quarry had dropped their rifles into the crook of their arms. Separated from each other by some little distance at the moment the shots were fired, they gradually approached a converging point at the foot of the ascent up which Vassalli had made his last dash for liberty. Meeting, each looked at the other with speculative glance.

"I reckon," said one, dryly and laconically, "I reckon one of us has settled him: he looks more like a stiff 'un than not."

The other nodded, but made no reply: his companion, who cuddled his rifle with the affection of an old soldier, looked at his fellow-warder out of the corner of his eye and smiled.

"He made a good target when he got against the skyline," he said, "I reckon I hit him, anyway."

The other man jerked his head from one shoulder to the other.

"Why," he said, "I don't very well see how anybody could miss him—what did you make it?—five hundred yards?"

"About that," answered the other laconically enough. "Ay, it was an easy enough shot, my lad—a bull, I should say, by the looks of him."

Then the two went slowly forward up the slope. The man who had spoken first, a great loose-limbed, athletic looking fellow of thirty-five to forty years of age, climbed the rough hillside with the careless, swinging stride of one who had been used to hill war-fare: his companion, a man of slighter build, panted a little as the slope became steep.

"I shouldn't care about this game every day," he said at last. "Especially in this sort of weather. It's a bit too hot to go a-hunting."

"I've felt hotter in India," remarked the other. "And I've known colder, too. A man-hunt in one country's pretty much like the same thing in any other."

"Well, this is ended," said his companion as he swung himself up the first beginnings of the rocks whereon Vassalli's body lay supine. "And I guess it's ended for good, too."

The big warder made no answer; he suddenly put on a spurt, passed his companion, and swung himself to the top of the craggy plateau. He went up to the convict's side and touched him on the shoulder with his foot. His eyes turned to his advancing companion.

"He's dead, right enough," he said. "I knew he was, by the way he came a cropper. Many's the Pathan I've seen fall like that as they were trying to get to cover amongst the rocks in their mountains."

The other man came up and looked at the body meditatively. "One through the head and one through the

shoulders," he said. "I aimed for about the middle of his back."

"Same here," said the other carelessly. He stooped, and, turning the body over, folded the hands decently at its sides and drew the cap over the face. "May as well make him decent till we can take him off," he said.

The other man made no reply—he turned away, and, shading his eyes with his hand, stared out across the land that lay beneath him. The other warders were still some distance away—one was steadily plodding his way towards the head of the Tor on foot, two others, mounted, were forcing their horses in the same direction through the knee-deep heather.

"Time to have a bit of a smoke before the others come up," he said, and laid down his rifle. He produced a pipe and a tobacco tin from under his tunic, and, having seen to his own needs, handed the tin to his companion, who accepted it with a nod of thanks, and brought out a pipe of his own. A match cracked, wreaths of grey smoke rose up: two living men smoked peacefully over the motionless body of a dead one.

The big warder presently sat down at a little distance, and stretched out his sturdy limbs with a sigh of content. His companion followed his example; they began to talk across the dead body.

"I've been thinking," said the big man, "that it's possible that I've had enough of this sort of thing—there's nobody can say that Princetown is exactly the centre of the universe. I don't know but what I shan't chuck it and have a taste of civilian life."

"What as?" asked the other.

"A public would suit me," replied the big warder. "A nice, comfortable, snug sort of public—I have my eye on the right sort of thing, in a way of speaking."

"Then you'd need a wife."

"At thirty-eight it's time I had one," answered the big man, stretching his arms out and smiling. "I've never given much thought to marrying, but I've nothing against it—nothing. I'd as soon marry as not, and, of course, if I go in for keeping a public I must give it a landlady."

"Where would you go for her?" asked his companion.

"Where I should go for the public," said the other. "To Yorkshire—that's where I should go, 'cause it's where I sprang from. Did you ever hear tell of a place called Castleford, in Yorkshire?—a manufacturing place where they make glass bottles by the million?—that's where I came from before I went into the Army."

"And where you'd go back to get married, I expect."

"There's no lasses like the Yorkshire lasses," said the Yorkshireman sententiously, "And a man naturally turns to his own country when he's a-thinking of settling down. I shouldn't have much bother in——"

He stopped short with something like a startled exclamation that was half choked in his throat. The other man looked up from the spot of ground upon which his eyes had been meditatively fixed, and saw that the big warder was staring at the rocks beneath him with an expression that seemed to indicate amazement or surprise.

"What is it?" asked the younger warder.

The big man's face cleared—he looked around, studying his companion's face as if to find out what he had seen.

"It's naught," he said. "I thought I saw a snake among

the rocks there. As I was saying about that public——"

A voice came from the slope below interrupting him. "Hollins! Lloyd! Are you there?"

The two warders rose to their feet, put aside their pipes and looked over the edge of the plateau. Their superior officer, a military-looking man of keen determined face, had ridden his horse up to the verge of the rocks in advance of the warders on horseback, and now sat gazing expectantly at the men above him, who touched their caps as they responded to his summons.

"Well?" he said, questioningly.

"He's dead, sir," answered the big warder. "Lloyd and me fired at him—we both hit him—head and heart, sir."

The man on horseback took his moustache between his teeth and bit it for a minute or two as if debating some question within his own mind. He looked up again.

"Well, you'll have to bring him down from those rocks," he said. "Hollins, you go over to that farm there and get a cart or something of the sort, and bring it across the moor as near this point as you can. Lloyd, you stay here with the body till the others come up, and then have it carried down."

Hollins raised his hand in obedience to orders, but he swore under his breath as he turned away to pick up his rifle.

"Damned nuisance to go tramping across to yon farm!" he muttered to Lloyd. "Why couldn't he send one of the mounted men?"

He swore again as he lurched down the rocks, and he turned an anxious glance on Lloyd as he left him. Lloyd, unheeding it, sat down again near the body, relighted his pipe and began to smoke peacefully. Hollins's

face cleared; he went rapidly away in the direction of the farmstead which his superior had pointed out.

The officer dismounted, put his arm through his horse's bridle, and, producing a cigar-case, selected a cigar and began to smoke. Everything was very still in the hot summer air, no sound broke the silence save the humming of the bees amongst the fresh flowered heather. Lloyd, puffing away at his pipe, became oppressed by this silence. The rigidity of the man whom he had killed ten minutes before grew distasteful to him—he half wished that the limbs, already stiffened in death, could jerk into life again. He got on his feet and looked about him—his superior had seated himself on a slab of rock, and was calmly smoking while he allowed his horse to nibble at the spots of pasturage which cropped up here and there amongst the heather. Hollins was striding along at a quick rate towards the farm; the other warders were advancing leisurely upon the centre point. Lloyd at last heard their voices; the sound was grateful to him. The feeling of oppression passed off; he sat down again, and this time, by sheer inadvertence, on the spot where Hollins had sat, while they talked. And, happening to look round him, he suddenly saw something that made him utter a sharp cry of astonishment and smother it in his own throat. He glanced sharply about him, and even gazed suspiciously at the dead man, as if he feared that Vassalli might suddenly spring to life again and spy upon his slayers' movements, and it was with a stealthy furtive air that he finally turned to look hard and long at what he had seen.

Lloyd's eyes had fallen on something that shone and glittered in a deep fissure of the rocks on which he sat. He thought at first that the things he saw were drops of

molten fire that had fallen by some mysterious chance upon the cool green of the rocks; it was a full minute before he realized that he was staring at a necklace of diamonds, the brilliancy and size of which suggested, even to his untutored mind, the notion of vast wealth. He lay and looked, and looked again, and his head swam with the joy of the discovery, and of the possibilities that lay behind it. His eyes grew accustomed to the darkness of the fissure, and he realized exactly what he saw. The thing was a massive necklace of diamonds, set in delicate gold network, and it had caught on the front of a clump of fern that grew out of the rock and hung dangling from it. Lloyd made no attempt to reach it; it hung at least six feet below his arm, and it would be necessary to get something with a hook at the end if the necklace was to be recovered.

Suddenly Lloyd burst into a hearty fit of cursing. He had remembered Hollins's sudden exclamation—made when he was sitting in that very spot and looking into that very fissure. The Yorkshireman, then, had seen the diamonds, and would doubtless lay claim to having found them. Very well—then it would have to be a case of sharing, of going halves. Lloyd cursed his ill-luck fervently under his breath—he had already conceived a plan by which he could have secured the diamonds for his own particular benefit. He was to have a day off next day, and had already resolved to spend it in a fishing expedition. Nothing would have been easier than to attach a hook to his fishing rod and draw up the diamonds from their hiding-place. But he was certain that Hollins already knew of them, and foresaw that Hollins would want his share. He wished he could secure the prize before Hollins

came back, and felt hurriedly in his pocket for string, thinking that he might improvise a hook out of a twig of heather. But he had nothing that he could make use of, and so he lay there, gloating over the diamonds, and cursing his bad luck one minute and chuckling over his good luck the next. After all, it was a rare find; he was certain that the stones were genuine, and must, therefore, be of immense value. If he could have handled them first he would have defended his title to them with his life: if they were to be shared he would see to it that he had his full half.

He suddenly leapt to his feet, impelled to action by a fear that filled his heart with fierce resentment. The other warders were approaching; it might be that they would peep and peer about and discover the diamonds. That was not to be thought of—if he could not have the whole of the apple himself, he could take good care that only one other mouth should bite at it. He went over to the side of the plateau farthest from that on which his superior sat and tore up armfuls of heather and bracken. Coming back to the fissure he filled up its mouth with the stuff thus collected and screened the diamonds from sight. Over the heather and the bracken he placed a large stone —no one could now look into the aperture wherein the treasure lay concealed. Lloyd stood up and looked around him. His fellow-warders had come up, on foot or on horseback, and were gathered about their superior. Hollins was coming back from the farm, out of the gatestead of which at that moment a boy drove a small cart, drawn by a moorland pony. Hollins was walking fast: it was plain to Lloyd that he wanted to get back to the plateau as quickly as possible.

Two warders came up the rocks—they and Lloyd lifted the dead man's body and carried it down the slope to the little group below, where they laid it down on to the heather until the cart came up. Hollins, his face purple with heat, came up almost at the double—he looked at the dead man, then at Lloyd, and then at the rocks above. Lloyd contrived to catch his eye, and favoured him with a wink. He turned aside from the others—Hollins followed him.

"Well?" he said.

"I've seen them, too," said Lloyd. "I wondered what you were startled at. But now I've seen them it'll have to be a case of share and share alike—that's flat."

Hollins cursed long and low under his breath.

CHAPTER II

THE HEAVY STONE

Lloyd looked over his shoulder at the other men.

"Don't give the show away," he said. "I don't want any of them chaps to go up there—a full half share is what I mean to have."

"Damnation!" said Hollins. "If Carey hadn't sent me off for that cart I'd ha' taken good care you didn't see 'em!"

"That's neither here nor there," said Lloyd. "I have seen them, and there's an end of it. Of course, it's got to be a sharing matter. Is it a bargain?"

"I expect it's got to be, as you say so," answered Hollins, with another curse. "How are we to get 'em out of that hole?" he asked. "And what," he added, "is to prevent anybody seeing them?"

"As to that," said Lloyd. "I've filled up the hole with heather and green stuff and put a stone over the top. As to getting them out, I'm having a day off tomorrow, and I'll come over here with a fishing rod and hook them out—I reckon they're a good six feet down."

"No, by God!" said Hollins. "That'll not do for me. Nobody gets a finger on them unless I'm there. It'll have to be done together."

"Well, they're safe enough at present anyway," said Lloyd. "Who'd expect to find a diamond necklace in a hole like that! We must arrange to come back together as soon as we can and get the thing out."

"Yes, it's got to be together," said Hollins thoughtfully. He lifted his eyes, which had remained fixed wearily on the ground during their conversation, and looked at Lloyd with a peculiar expression. "It's got to be together all through. I'll say straight out that I'd aim at keeping yon little discovery"—here he jerked his head towards the rocks above—"all to myself, but since you've come across the shiners as well as me I'm bound to play a fair game. You play straight with me, and I'll play straight with you."

"Oh, that's all right!" answered Lloyd. "They're safe enough at present," he added reflectively. "Let's settle what we're to do later on—here's the cart come up now."

They strolled slowly back to the group standing near Vassalli's body, and stood by while it was laid on the cart and carried over. Then the whole company set out in the direction of Princetown, the mounted men riding ahead. Hollins and Lloyd walked together, their rifles slung over their shoulders, their heads bent towards the ground as if in deep thought.

"How do you suppose they came there?" asked Lloyd suddenly. "Seems a strange place to find a necklace."

"I reckon they were on him," answered Hollins, nodding gloomily at the cart and its gruesome load. "Dropped in when he was shot—that's how it has been, you may be sure."

"But how on earth could he have got hold of them?" asked Lloyd. "I wonder if he'd had them planted on the moor somewhere—let's see, what was it he was lagged for?"

"Scragging somebody in Plymouth," said Hollins carelessly. "I should think he had had them planted. But

that's neither here nor there—the question is, when and how can we get at them?"

They walked on in silence for some time, thinking of various plans for obtaining possession of the diamonds. At last Hollins paused and looked fixedly at his companion.

"Look here, Lloyd," he said. "I don't believe in leaving things to chance. It was by chance that we came across the necklace, and chance might bring somebody else across it. Supposing anybody goes up to the top of those rocks and happens to think it queer that a lot of heather and green stuff should be packed into that hole, and pulls it all out for mischief or curiosity, where'd our diamonds be?"

"That's true," said Lloyd. He stroked his chin reflectively. "What's to be done?" he asked. "What would you do?"

"I'll tell you what we will do," answered Hollins, with emphasis. "We'll go back and fetch 'em now—that's what we will do. I shan't feel comfortable till we've got 'em in safe keeping."

Lloyd looked at the warders in front of them.

"What about the others?" he said. "We don't want them to know."

Hollins measured the distance between themselves and the others with a quick glance of his eye.

"Sit down and rest a bit," he said, himself suiting the action to the word. "Let them go on in front and out of sight. Then we'll go back to the rocks and get the shiners—we'll contrive something safe as we go."

Lloyd sat down at his companion's side. They both

lighted their pipes and smoked—the men in front passed out of sight behind the shoulder of the hill.

"What shall we do with 'em when we get 'em?" said Lloyd, suddenly breaking in on a lengthy silence. "I should say that if they're the real thing (and so far as I could judge, they are real enough, and I had a brother-in-law that was a working jeweller in Swansea, so I ought to know a bit about it), they must be worth a good bit."

"Thousands," muttered Hollins. He bit savagely on the stem of his pipe and kicked the turf with the heel of his boot, both actions indicative of the tumult within his mind. "I don't know at present what's to be done with 'em. It'll be a bit of a difficult matter to get rid of them in such a fashion as to be really profitable to ourselves. And you'll understand me when I say that I'm not going to be a party to trading 'em off to some damned old Jew that would cheat us out of our rights and keep the best for himself."

"Nor me," affirmed Lloyd. "I want as much as I can get."

"If I'm aught of a judge," said Hollins, "we've such a chance in this as a man rarely gets. Them diamonds must be worth a fortune—I know a bit about 'em, because I've seen 'em in India—I've seen 'em in the Temples there—Lord! why, I know where there's an image that blazes with precious stones. Some of the chaps in my company used to amuse themselves by inventing plans for getting hold of the lot. But that was naught but foolishness—if you'd to pinch a diamond out o' one of them temples the priests would follow you all over the world till they got it back."

"Well, but what are you going to do with 'em?" reiterated Lloyd.

Hollins gave a long sigh and scratched his arms as if some muscular exertion might suggest a plan to him.

"There's one thing certain," he said, "and that is that we shall have to get away from yon place. I shall give in my notice today."

"And me," said Lloyd. "But—will it look at all queer if we leave at the same time?"

"We shall have to chance that," answered Hollins. "I shall say I'm tired of the life and going to start a public. You can make what excuse you please."

"And after that?" asked Lloyd. "Where then?"

"I reckon London is the place," said Hollins musingly. "They say you can do everything in London. We shall have to go there and try to sell 'em."

"Don't it look a bit queer like to offer all the lot at once?" suggested Lloyd. "We don't want any awkward questions asked, and they might want to know how we came to be in possession of a necklace like that."

Hollins got up and walked about with his hands behind his back and his brows knitted.

"I'll tell you what, my lad," he said at last. "This is how it'll have to be. We shall have to take them stones out of the settings, cart 'em out to South Africa, and come back with 'em; we shall have to give out as we're diamond merchants, or something o' that sort—miners, or prospectors, or whatever they call it."

"I thought those chaps always brought their stuff home in the rough," said Lloyd. "I believe I read something to that effect somewhere."

"Damn it! I believe they do," said Hollins. "I hadn't

thought of that. And, of course, they are cut and all the rest of it. Well, we must think of something. But now let's be handling them. I think the coast's clear." He climbed a little way up the hillside, and gazed from under his hands in the direction by which the other warders had gone forward with the body, and presently returning to Lloyd said that they were quite out of sight, and that there was no one near the plateau of rocks where the diamonds lay hidden. The two men picked up their rifles and turned back. Coming to a strip of stunted woodlands that ran down a gully on the hillside, Hollins paused and drew out a clasp knife. "I am going to cut a hook out of one of these twigs," he said. "It so happens that I've got a line of string about me, and if we put a hook at the end we'll soon have the beauties up."

Lloyd made no reply—he watched Hollins cut a fourth twig into the desired shape with meditative eyes. He was reflecting that if he had had the luck to have a line of string in his pockets, and could have improvised a line, he could have secured the diamonds himself when he first discovered them.

"There's one thing strikes me," he remarked as they set out again. "There's no doubt Vassalli had these diamonds planted somewhere, and got hold of 'em again when he escaped, and it's most likely he stole them—it must have been some big burglary. Won't their description be known?"

"We shan't offer them as they are," said Hollins. "We shan't be such fools as to put our necks in a noose like that. They must be broken up and sold in parcel. That trip to South Africa and back seems as if it would have to come off."

"That means spending money," said Lloyd.

"It's laying out capital," replied Hollins sententiously. "If you want to do big things you've got to spend money on 'em. I reckon we've both got a bit put away that we can use if we see a good return for our outlay."

"Oh, I've saved a bit," said Lloyd. "I'm good for a hundred pounds or so. But why shouldn't we give it out that we were back from South Africa, without really going there? We could pretend we'd been."

"And supposing they started asking us questions about the country?" said Hollins, with a sneer at his companion's lack of foresight. "We should look a couple of fools in that case. No, if you're doing business, do it in a business-like fashion—that's what I say."

They had now come to the foot of the rocks which crowned the Tor, and they paused and looked carefully about them. Not a living soul was in sight on that side of the hill, and the silence was as oppressive as it had felt to Lloyd at the moment when he found himself alone with Vassalli's dead body. Neither of the men spoke as they climbed up to the top of the rocks; both breathed heavily.

"Now then," said Hollins, as they came to the top. "Let's see if there's anybody about on the other side."

They crossed the little plateau and looked over. The land was just as deserted on that side as on the other; the only sign of human existence was in the presence of the little moorland farmstead a mile away, from which Hollins had fetched the pony and cart, and no figure moved in its neighbourhood.

"Nobody about?" said Hollins. "Now then, let's to work."

He bent down and lifted the big stone which Lloyd had

placed over the fissure at the point where he had filled up the cavity above the diamonds with heather and bracken. Lloyd dropped on his knees, stretched himself flat along the rocks, and began to draw out the green stuff from the fissure. His head rested on a ledge of stone as he worked; his arm was plunged at full length into the cavity below.

It was at this moment that the instinct of murder shot full-flamed into Hollins's mind. He saw his fellow at his mercy, his head resting against the ledge of rock; his eyes, closing with the exertion of reaching far down into the fissure for the stuff which covered the diamonds; he felt the heavy stone in his own hands turn to a terrible weapon, and the demons of greed and covetousness within him suddenly gave willing place to a devil who urged him to slay. In fancy he could hear the man's skull crack against the stone.

"I can scarcely reach," began Lloyd, pantingly. "My arm's not——"

Hollins, with one deep breath, lifted the heavy stone and brought it down with a sickening crash upon his companion's head. He heard the bones go, and shut his eyes at the sound—when he opened them a second later he found that he himself had sprung back a yard or two, and was standing crouched like a wild beast with clutched and shaking hands in readiness to spring again in attack or defence. But Lloyd was in no case for reprisal—he lay supine across the fissure; his body drawn up uglily, as an insect draws itself up when one treads the life out of it; what could be seen of his head under the stone that still rested upon it was a loathsome mass of blood and brains. The life had been crushed out of him at one blow.

Hollins stood up, sighed deeply, stared round him at the glittering sky and the wide loneliness of the moors, and shook himself. He spat on the ground as if to rid his mouth of an unpleasant taste, and drew his hand once or twice across his lips as though he had just drank. Then he spat again.

"After all," he muttered, "I saw them first and I'd the best right. He shouldn't have interfered. I don't believe in sharing."

He went up to the body and touched it with his foot.

"Hi! Lloyd!" he said in a fierce whisper. "Lloyd!"

The world around him was very silent—the bees in the heather seemed to have ceased their labours for that time.

"It's done him," said Hollins. "Well, now then——"

He suddenly tore off his tunic, doubled up his shirt sleeves, and fell to work with a feverish activity that drove the sweat out of him in streams.

CHAPTER III

FLIGHT

It is possible that Hollins, like all murderers, had very little clear idea of what he was doing the first quarter of an hour that elapsed after he had killed his victim. Murders such as his, committed on the spur of the moment, are the acts of men whose reason has been temporarily destroyed: the things which immediately succeed are involuntary and result from the pressing necessity of mechanical action. The mind, reduced to the condition of a machine which goes blindly forward, even though the hand of the machinist has been suddenly forced away from the controlling lever, performs certain functions and compels the body to act in conformity with them. Thus Hollins, sweating away in the blinding and scorching sunlight, was for that time at least no more than an animal whose sole instinct it was to hide the evidence of its guilt.

But, in spite of all this, he worked systematically and with strict attention to the needs of the moment. He drew out the remainder of the heather and bracken from the fissure, and saw the diamonds still glittering like points of fire as they hung dangling from the frond of fern in the cool shade beneath. He produced from his pocket the line of stout string of which he had spoken to Lloyd, attached to it the hook which he had cut on their way back to the plateau, let it down into the fissure with steady hands, carefully caught the necklet, detached it from the fern, and drew it up to the light and himself. His next action

was characteristic—he detached the diamonds from the hook and line, gave one quick glance at them as if to assure himself of their reality, and then carelessly tossed them upon his tunic as if they were of no more value than a string of glass beads. But the action meant that they were his. His, not to be shared with anyone; his, and only his in the world; his, at the price of a man's life. He would have time enough and to spare later on wherein to make close inspection of them; at present he had more pressing needs.

In the very moment wherein he was compelled by the devil of murder within him to dash the life out of his comrade with one blow of the heavy stone, Hollins had seen something in one of those rare illuminations which only come at the great crisis of life. He was killing Lloyd at the very edge of what would be Lloyd's grave. The fissure across which the younger warder lay, and from which he was drawing out the heather and bracken, was long enough and wide enough to take in his body, and its depth appeared to be considerable. Within it Hollins meant to lay his victim. He stood straddle-legged across it, looking down into its cool depths. Fern grew out of its side here and there; he caught sight of a lizard that came creeping out of a crevice and crawled away on its belly along a narrow ledge. It seemed very deep and very quiet. He picked up a pebble from his feet and dropped it plumb into the depths beneath him. It seemed to be some time before he heard it fall, with a faint trickling sound on whatever it was that formed the floor of the subterranean cavern into which the fissure opened. Hollins could not conceive that any human eye could penetrate into those depths; that any human hand would ever

open out the crown of the mountain. The dead man, in his opinion, might sleep there undisturbed until the last trump echoed across the desolate moorlands.

His eye selected the best place wherein to drop the body, and he bent down, seized Lloyd under the armpits, and, half twisting him round, slipped his head and shoulders over the opening. Then he transferred his grasp to the dead man's ankles, and suddenly lifting the legs he shot him head foremost into the fissure at its widest part, steadying the fall until he could reach no farther. Suddenly he released his grasp—the body, gaining momentum, slid forward beneath the frond of fern, and disappeared in the blackness far beneath.

Hollins got down on hands and knees and looked carefully into the fissure. He examined it from every possible point of view, endeavouring to decide if it were by any means likely that searchers could see anything of the dead man. He crept all round it, looking straight down into it, looking into it from slant and corners; he set fire to a bundle of dry heather, and, using it as a torch, held it down into the fissure as far as he could. Even that did not satisfy him—he made a second torch, attached the line of string to it, set the torch on blaze, and lowered it down to the full length of the line. But he saw nothing in the depths below, and he let the line slip from his fingers as a useless thing. He rose from his hands and knees and looked round him. Two traces of his crime met his anxiously searching eyes. Leaning against a rock in company with his own was Lloyd's rifle,—he walked over, seized it, and dropped it into the fissure after the body, taking the same precautions that it could not be seen from above. Then he turned and looked at the other

evidence of violence, and his face puckered into a frown.

That, he was saying to himself somewhere far back in his inner self, could not be allowed to remain. Blood, and bits of bone, and bits of brain, found where such matters were not likely to be found in the ordinary course of events, would lead to an investigation which might have unpleasant results. And there they were, plentifully evident on the flat stone against which Lloyd's life had been crushed out, and on the stone which had crushed it out, and on the edge of the grave into which his body had been dropped. Hollins looked at them with a curious disgust—his old soldier instinct was all for cleanliness and order, and he cursed Lloyd for making such a mess of things. But since Lloyd was dead, and could not make the place tidy, there was nought for it but that he must make it tidy himself.

A sudden notion took him—the thought of Vassalli. He walked across the plateau to the spot where the convict had fallen dead—yes, just as he had expected, there was blood there, too. He mused over the matter for a moment or two. If search was made for Lloyd—as there certainly would be—that place would be visited since he had last been seen there. Would the searchers take the blood on the rocks for Vassalli's, or would they remember that the convict dropped some little distance away? Vassalli's blood, dry enough in the sun by that time, made a little pool on the ground where his body had lain; soon there would be nothing but discoloration of the surface. But on the rocks there was more than blood.

He went back to the rocks resolved to take no risk. He would have to clear up. He set his mind to work in the effort to remember whether he had noticed water any-

where in the neighbourhood of the plateau, but could not think of stream or spring, or even a standing pool. For a moment he stood irresolute through helplessness. The old-soldier instinct reasserted itself; he sat down, took off his boots, divested himself of his stockings, and put his boots on again. He cursed Lloyd soundly once more as he made a floor-cloth of the rolled-up stockings and set to work on his task.

When it was over, and had been made as good a job of as was possible under the circumstances, he dropped the stockings into the fissure and straightened his back. A further notion came to him as he inspected the rock, and he searched about until he found a likely stone where-with the stained surface might be scrubbed. And once more he went down on his hands and knees, and worked thoroughly and hard, and when he threw the stone away, at last he was satisfied. An hour of sunlight—better still, a night of dew, and a sunshiny morning to follow, and no one would know that a man's brains had been spilt on the spot at which Hollins looked with jealous eyes.

There was now nothing more to be done, and, with his realization of the fact that his task was successfully completed, Hollins also arrived at something like a return to sanity, or an understanding of his actual position in the world. He had murdered a fellow-being, and forfeited the right to live in consequence, his first care, then, must be to secure his own safety. As at the beginning of matters he had inspected his immediate surroundings, so at the end of them he again examined the country around him. It was as lonely and deserted as ever, so far as he could see, and he determined to get away from it as quickly as possible.

His face, neck, hands, and arms were beaded with sweat; his throat and mouth were parched with a particularly annoying form of thirst. He took out his handkerchief and cleansed his skin of moisture as well as he could; he put a thimbleful of loose tobacco in his mouth and chewed it, and some measure of relief circulated through mind and body. The picture of a roadside inn, in far away Yorkshire, came into the orbit of his mental vision—an inn where you could get real home-brewed ale out of a cool cellar: at the thought of it his tongue curled to the roof of his mouth.

"A pint of old Dick's home-brewed ale," he said. "Much good it is to think of that!"

He picked up his tunic, got into it with manifest distaste, and then picked up the diamonds from the loose earth to which they had slid as he drew the tunic from under them. His eyes devoured them with fierce glances; his fingers strayed soothingly over the gems and their settings.

"There's no doubt about you being the real sort," he muttered. "I wonder whose neck you ought to be round if everybody had their own?"

Something conveyed to him with great subtlety that this mere acquisition of the diamonds had led him to take the first step towards placing something round his own neck, and the thought impelled him to motion. He put the necklet in his breast pocket, picked up his rifle, and, with one slow deliberate inspection of the plateau, moved off. At the edge of the rocks he turned and looked round —something told him that he would never again set eyes on that infinitesimal fragment of the world's surface, and that the memoried picture of it would never leave him.

He would never set foot on it again, but he would visit it a thousand times in his dreams.

"If Lloyd had not chance to set eyes on, 'em, too!" he said.

Then he made his way down to the rocks and the slope, and round the shoulder of the Tor, and was a good mile on his return journey to Princetown before he pulled himself up short and asked himself what he was going to do next. And that question necessitating a good deal of thought, he sat down on the heather at the side of the track which he was following and proceeded to think it out over the smoking of a pipe of tobacco.

That there would be questions asked when he got back to the prison was a certainty. He might put them off by saying that Lloyd had been overcome by the heat, and was remaining at some moorland farmstead or cottage until he could recover himself, but that excuse would not hold good for more than twenty-four hours. The question was, could he, within twenty-four hours, contrive to get away from the place and the district? He began to think what might be done. He could plead indisposition himself on his return. He could change into civilian attire at his quarters; when night fell he could get away by train. He had plenty of money in a box in his room to serve his present needs; his savings were invested in a Friendly Society in a Yorkshire town to which he had been in the habit of sending them for years. So far as he could see, Hollins knew nothing to keep him from immediately leaving Dartmoor. The question which chiefly agitated his mind was—would it be wise to go at once or to wait and abide the inquiry into Lloyd's disappearance which must necessarily follow. If he himself disappeared, taking

French leave, would it not seem to connect him with Lloyd's disappearance? And would not a hue-and-cry be raised?

He wrestled, not over clear-mindedly, with this question for some time, and when he at last rose to his feet and continued his journey he had made up his mind to go at once. With the instinct of his particular type he wanted to fly, and it seemed to him that he could fly with full success. He would get off that very night; he would walk across country to get a train and book at some station where he was not known, and where no particular notice would be taken of his appearance; he could make his way to his native place, Castleford, in Yorkshire, by tacking about from one point to another; at Castleford he would draw his savings from the building society, and with them and the diamonds safely secured, would go west to Liverpool, or southward to Southampton, and get a ship for the Cape. Later on again he would return to England in the character of a diamond merchant and realize his possessions. That, to his mind, seemed the straightest and most possible plan; the plainest path to take.

He made his way back to the convict establishment and reported himself, and accounted for Lloyd's absence by saying that his fellow-warder had been seriously affected by the intense heat and had had to turn into a moorland farm and rest. Nobody seemed to see anything strange in this, nor in Hollins's request to be excused duty that night in view of his exertions in the chase after Vassalli. He felt himself safe from inquiry, or pursuit or suspicion for several hours, and a feeling of confidence began to assert itself in him. After he had refreshed himself he felt more confident than ever, and in the privacy of his own

room began to make his preparations. He had a sum of from forty to fifty pounds in notes and gold and silver in his box, and when he had exchanged his uniform for a tweed suit, and put all his belongings in order and destroyed the papers he did not want, he secured his valuables in a waist belt and was ready for anything. Late at night he set out: before noon next day he was in Bristol.

He stopped there for a few hours in order to make himself still more secure. He remembered that some of his fellow-officers were familiar with the tweed suit: on arrival at Bristol he went to a ready-made clothing establishment and bought a new one of fashionable appearance and style. He put it on in one of the dressing-rooms of the establishment, and, having purchased a small portmanteau, bestowed the old suit in it and went away. Pursuing his plan of doubling about, he took train from Bristol to Swindon later in the day, and at Swindon put up for the night. Next day he travelled to Rugby, and thence to Birmingham, where he spent another night. On the following morning he resolved to make his final dash for Castleford, and set out for the North immediately after he had breakfasted. Opening a morning newspaper as the train moved out of the station, Hollins's eye was caught by a heavy head-line which announced a Remarkable Chain of Murders in South Devonshire.

CHAPTER IV

THE FEAR OF UNKNOWN THINGS

From the moment that Hollins, in his own opinion, found himself comfortably clear of Dartmoor, he had begun to drink. For the first twenty-four hours he was too busy to think of this means of dulling the various torments that had already begun twisting and tearing his heart, but when it came to a question of spending a whole night at Swindon with nothing but his own thoughts for company, he had recourse to liquor. He sat in a quiet corner of the smoking-room of the modest hotel which he had selected, after inspecting those which the town boasted, and drank whisky steadily until he felt sleepy, whereupon he retired to his room. He slept for two or three hours and woke sweating with terror—he had dreamed of Lloyd, headless, pursuing him up and down the sunlit hillsides. He slept no more that night, and had a bad headache when he rose in the morning. He tried to cure it by liberal potations of brandy and soda water from breakfast time until noon, when he reverted to whisky, which he consumed whenever he got the chance, chiefly at railway refreshment rooms, until he paused for the night at Birmingham. There was some notion in his mind that it would do him good to get decently drunk; he remembered that on a certain occasion in India when he had got into trouble, he had drunk himself into a resigned, if not quite cheerful, state of mind, and he wanted to do it again. He was not afraid of making any disturbance, of attract-

ing attention to himself, or of doing anything that would bring him into the hands of the police. He was one of those men who can assimilate a quantity of liquor in a peaceable and quietly comfortable fashion with bed and sleep at the end of the debauch. He never wanted to shout, or sing, or fight, or engage in animated discussion on these occasions, and thus it had previously happened that he had indulged without other folk being much the wiser. But Hollins had discovered that the usual result of deep drinking did not follow. He ate a hearty meal early in the evening after his arrival in Birmingham, and thereafter went round the town, calling in at one bar after another and having two or three glasses of whisky in each. At ten o'clock he returned to his hotel, and until twelve sat in the smoking-room drinking whiskies and sodas supplied to him by a waiter, who secretly marvelled at the stranger's thirst. But he did not grow sleepy or feel the least signs of intoxication; his brain was, if anything, clearer than ever; he felt as wide awake as a healthy man does after a night's sound sleep. At twelve o'clock he felt that, in all common decency, he ought to go to bed, but he knew that if he did he would not sleep, and the horrors of the previous wakeful night haunted and frightened him. He wanted more whisky, but was ashamed to ask for it. Then fortune favoured him. The waiter went off duty; the night porter came in and set out an array of spirit bottles, lemons, and sugar, and similar temptations on a table at the end of the room, and Hollins saw a chance of further indulgence. He caught the night porter's eye and beckoned him to draw near, and he spoke to him confidentially. "What's a good thing for a night-cap?" he asked. "I haven't been sleeping well

these last few nights—I should think a drop of something hot, now, would be the straight ticket, wouldn't it?"

The night porter said that was what a good many gentlemen took last thing of a night. Some preferred rum and some whisky—different gentlemen had different tastes.

"I'll try rum," said Hollins, "perhaps you'll mix it?—and make it a stiff 'un."

"A large rum—hot—with sugar and lemon? Very good, sir," said the night porter.

The hot grog sent a glow of something like renewed life through Hollins—things began to look cheery again. After all, he said to himself, there was naught to fear—he was too old a bird to be easily caught. By the time he had come to the end of his glass he was developing such a state of satisfied comfort that he beckoned to the night porter and asked him to repeat the dose. The night porter saw nothing unusual in this request, and obeyed the customer's order. Hollins tipped off the second glass and went to bed. He fell into a drunken sleep at once, for the hot liquor was acting on the multitudinious glasses of brandy and soda and whisky and soda which he had taken during the day, and he was conscious of nothing when his head touched the pillow but a gentle rocking sensation which was by no means unpleasant, and seemed to promise a soothing night. He lay like a log in absolute unconsciousness until the grey dawn came stealing through his windows, and then he suddenly woke with a feeling of black horror and despair and agonizing fear tearing and rending at his heart-strings. He sprang up and tried to find a light; the instant that his feet touched the floor his head whirled like a spinning top, and he fell with a heavy

crash. The fall sobered him; he picked himself up and sat, quaking and shivering, on the edge of his bed, staring at the gathering light. Towards morning, drooping back on the bed, he fell into a fitful slumber—a ray of sunlight shot in at last and touched his face and woke him from a dream wherein Lloyd, with a crushed and bloody head hanging from his neck, was stalking him through the streets of a great city.

Hollins felt sick, ill, and miserable. He plunged his head into cold water; he tried to pull himself together; at last he was sufficiently master of himself to go down to the coffee-room. He took the seat which the waiter held out for him and gazed with frowning eyes at the bill of fare. Ordinarily he was a great eater; on that particular morning he had no taste for food. His mouth was parched; his hands shaking. The waiter eyed him all over and drew his own conclusions.

"I don't know," said Hollins. "I'm not feeling so well this morning."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the waiter. "Allow me to suggest something, sir. A few strips of anchovy toast, now, sir, to begin with—a wonderful pick-me-up, sir, if properly made, and I'll see to the making myself. And some strong coffee, sir, with a liqueur brandy in it?"

"Ay, that's the ticket," said Hollins. He leaned over the paper which the waiter discreetly unfolded for him: the print swam before his eyes and he did not see a single word in its columns. When the waiter re-appeared he took a greedy gulp at the coffee, and felt almost childish gratitude because it revived him; he drank the cup off and asked for another, and he managed to eat a few strips of the anchovy toast, and was then persuaded to

try a kippered herring, and he eventually rose from the table feeling very much better than when he sat down to it. But his legs carried him straight into the bar attached to the smoking-room, and there he had three brandies and sodas in quick succession, and it was in drinking these that he made up his mind to go straight down to Castleford. After that he paid his bill and went to the station. He had nearly an hour to wait before he could get an express to Yorkshire, and he employed that hour by visiting various saloon bars in the vicinity and drinking more brandy. And feeling by this time that liquor was the only friend he had in the world he purchased a leather-cased flask and had it filled with brandy at the station refreshment-room.

Hollins was in this state when he opened the newspaper in the train and saw the heading relative to what the newspaper folk called a Remarkable Chain of Murders in South Devonshire. His nerves, jumpy and unstrung, almost collapsed as his eyes fell on the bold lettering at the head of the column, and it was fortunate for him that he was alone in his compartment, for his hands shook so much that the sheet fell from them. He picked it up again—after a pull at his flask—and read the article from start to finish.

It narrated a strange and startling story. On a certain night of that week the bodies of two men had been found in Plymouth, under circumstances and in situations which showed that they had without doubt been murdered. One man, a well-known Jew pawn-broker, named Aaron Josephs, was discovered in his parlour, strangled by a silken rope; another, a Hindu of unknown name, was found in a low district of the town, in a room which he

had only rented that very afternoon, stabbed to death. Next day had come news from the Dartmoor district which set forth an equally strange story. A hut on the moor had taken fire; when some neighbouring folks had gone to it they had discovered the half-burnt body of an unknown man who had been killed by a violent blow on the head. He had been stripped of his clothes, and close by him lay a convict's dress. Between this and the next link in the chain of strange events there was an easy connection. A convict, named Stefano Vassalli, had escaped from the convict prison at Princetown the previous evening, and had lurked about the moor all night. There was not doubt that he had found the unknown man sleeping in the hut, had taken him unawares, and had killed him for the sake of his clothing. Vassalli himself, leaving the hut, had been overtaken by the pursuing warders and shot dead, and his body had been recovered and taken back to the prison. Such was the bald narrative of the events, as set forth in the newspapers.

It was the theory of the newspaper people that between the first two murders there was some connection, and that the half-burnt body found in the hut was that of the murderer. Hollins, after one or two more nips at his flask of brandy, worked out a theory of his own. The man in the hut must have murdered either the pawnbroker or the Hindu, or both, for the diamonds—Vassalli, having killed the man in the hut for the sake of the clothes, had found the diamonds in them. He breathed more freely when he found that there was no mention of the diamonds—their existence was evidently unknown to the newspaper people. It seemed to him that, as far as the diamonds were concerned, he was absolutely safe.

At that moment another head-line, in print of a smaller type, caught his eye, and at the sight his nerves fell to pieces again. It announced the strange disappearance of two warders from Princetown. Hollins grasped the paper firmly between his trembling fingers and read. It was a bare announcement that William Hollins and David Lloyd, two warders employed at the convict prison on Dartmoor, had mysteriously disappeared, and set forth all that was known to Hollins himself up to the time he had quitted his quarters. But it also told more. It had been found out already that Lloyd had not called in at any farmstead or cottage to seek for assistance or rest. Therefore Hollins's story was a fabrication. It had also been discovered that a moorsman, crossing the Tors, had seen a warder, who seemed to answer Hollins's description, descending alone from the plateau of rocks whereon Vassalli's body had been found earlier in the morning. The suspicious circumstances under which Hollins had gone away were also narrated, and it was finally stated that the authorities were inclined to believe that Lloyd's disappearance was the result of foul play, and were anxious to have news of Hollins. And then, by way of postscript, followed a very literal description of Hollins himself, in which considerable stress was laid on the character of his moustache, an adornment of which he had always been very proud, and was the distinguishing feature of his face.

If Hollins could have pulled out his moustache hair by hair he would have done it there and then. He felt certain that now that the whole business had got into the newspapers he would be recognized very quickly, and that things would be made extremely unpleasant for him. There was a strip of mirror in his compartment, and he

got up and looked at his reflection in it. There were hollows under his eyes and lines about his face that had not been there three days before. But Hollins did not notice them: his gaze was fixed on his moustache.

He left the train at Derby, went into the town, and wandered about until in a quiet side street he came across a small barber's shop of such humble pretensions that he felt safe in entering it. The barber was reading a newspaper when Hollins walked in, and the sight made him sweat with fear. He sat down and asked for a shave, and watched the barber's face narrowly in the mirror as he shaved his cheeks and chin, thinking that he would soon detect any signs of recognition. But the barber gave no sign of curiosity, and Hollins, with a clean chin and cheeks, asked for a clean upper lip. The barber seemed surprised.

"Bit of a pity, isn't it, to take off a fine moustache like that," he said. "There's them that would give their eyes to have one like it—what a fuss some of 'em do make 'cause they can't grow one!"

Hollins, to whom fear had communicated various acts during the past few days, gave an exhibition of dissimulation.

"It's not a question of choice," he said. "It's a question of necessity. I've just got a new place as coachman, and the governor insists on clean shaves—so off it's got to come."

"Not even a side whisker?" said the barber.

"Not a hair," said Hollins. "It's a wonder he don't want me to wear a wig."

"Well, if it's a good place," said the barber, "you can make a bit of a sacrifice. But you'll not grow a moustache

like that in a hurry again, I can tell you. I reckon you've never shaved it any time."

"Can't say as ever I did," said Hollins.

He went out of the barber's shop with a hairless face, and with the certainty that no one would recognize him. He felt easier after this episode, and, returning to the station, pursued his journey northward. But before he got into the train he visited the refreshment bar and had a drink or two, and refilled his flask, and he took a pull at it whenever the world looked black. He refreshed himself in this way at Sheffield, and again at Normanton, and the flask went across the counter empty in the refreshment-room of both stations, and was returned to him full.

He purposely arrived at Castleford late at night, and by that time the liquor he had taken was having some effect upon him, but in a way which he could not understand. He was excitable and nervous, and he nearly jumped out of his skin when, having turned out of the station door, he felt a hand suddenly grasp his arm. He faced round on the man who had thus accosted him with a savage growl.

"Damn you!" he snarled, "Let me go."

The man who had laid hands on him drew back a little; he lifted a deprecating hand.

"Eh, Bill!" he said. "Don't you remember me? your old pal, Stafford Finney? Here—come along with me—I've something to tell you. And for God's sake, Bill Hollins, keep on the dark side of the street!"

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT-WATCHMAN

At these words Hollins became suddenly alive to the fact that some crisis was at hand. He drew nearer to Finney and looked searchingly in his face.

"What's up?" he said. "What's it all mean—why should I keep on the dark side of the street?"

Finney looked about him—the yard outside the little station was dark and deserted of life—a stray lamp here and there gave out a feeble sputter of yellow light, and between them lay simply patches of blackness. The two men had unconsciously drawn nearer to one of them as they talked.

"What's the meaning of it all?" repeated Hollins resentfully.

Finney advanced his face close to Hollins's ear.

"Bill," he whispered, "the police are wanting you—they're on the look-out—there was a plain-clothes man on the station, but you shaved your moustache off."

Hollins pulled himself up. He was not as surprised as he might have been, but he was thunderstruck to find that things were happening so quickly. He stared at Finney with incredulous eyes and laughed hoarsely.

"Police! wanting me?" he said. "What the hell do the police want me for, I'd like to know."

Finney pulled out a newspaper from his coat-pocket and tapped it with a significant gesture of his fingers.

"Bill," he whispered in a still lower voice. "Bill!—they —they've found Lloyd's body! It's all here in the evening paper—in the *Evening Post*—Bill."

The silence that followed was broken by Hollins.

"Damnation!" he said. "They can't ha' done that—it's a damned lie."

"It's true enough, Bill," replied Finney earnestly. "It's all here in the paper—you can read it for yourself. But I heard of it sooner; you see, with having been in the force before I lost my leg—you didn't notice that, did you, Bill?—I hear a thing or two now and again, and, of course, when the matter of your disappearance was in the papers this morning, I dropped in at the station, casual like, just to see if they'd heard anything."

"Had they?" asked Hollins.

"At that time they hadn't, but they did hear before noon," answered Finney.

"What did they hear?"

"Nay, it was naught but a wire asking them to keep a look-out for you in case you came down here," said Finney. "Of course, they knew you were a Castleford man——"

"Damn it!" growled Hollins. "If they did know it, I didn't know that they did—I never told them."

"You forget how easy it is to trace an old soldier, Bill," remarked Finney. "And you can do a deal in an hour or two when you've once set the telegraph wires to work."

Hollins stood staring at his old comrade as if he did not know what to say next. He was now amazed at the rapid alteration in the state of affairs, and his brain, dull and stupid from the quantity of drink which he

had taken, refused to act properly when called upon.

"Must be all a damned mistake—this finding of him," he jerked out suddenly. "How in hell could they find him?"

"They let a man with lights down the hole in the rocks by a rope," answered Finney. "That's what it says in the evening papers. Today, at noon, that was, and, of course, they cried the news all over the country. You're pretty badly wanted, Bill—there's no doubt about it!"

Hollins felt that his old acquaintance was speaking the truth, and he looked at him again in the gloom, and strove, in a vague, dull fashion, to realize the full significance of the situation.

"How did you come to know me?" he asked at last. " 'Tis ten years since we met, and I've had my moustache shaved off."

"I didn't know you at first, Bill," replied the other. "I saw you on the platform at Normanton (I came on from there by your train), and, at first, I couldn't have told you from Adam. But I'd just been reading all about it in the newspaper, and it struck me the man walking up and down the platform was you, and I looked you over again, carefully, and then I knew you. I watched you through the glass door, when you went into the refreshment room to get a drink, and I recognized the way in which you lifted your glass to your mouth. Then I got into the next carriage to yours, and there was a plain-clothes man at the station here, but he didn't tumble to you at all. But he's a new man—there are plenty in the town that will know you, moustache or not."

"Then I'd better make myself scarce," said Hollins,

returning towards the station. "It seems likely to be rather too hot for me here."

"There's no more trains tonight," said Finney.

"Then I'll use my legs," said Hollins.

He seemed to be about to sheer off; the one-legged man stepped in front of him.

"Bill," he said meaningly, "Bill!"

"Well, what the hell is it?" inquired Hollins.

"You'd better be advised by me, Bill," said Finney persuadingly. "I reckon you've made something handsome out of all this—you're not the sort to run big risks for nothing. Make it worthy my while, and I'll put you in a safe place here, and get you off safely, too."

Hollins stared at him, with something like suspicion in his heart and in the look which he cast upon him.

"How do I know you won't give me away?" he asked.

"Not if you make it worth my while, Bill," said Finney.

"Well," said Hollins, "what can you do for me?"

"It's this way," answered Finney, with cheerful alacrity: "When I had my accident, six years ago and lost my left leg (run over, I was, Bill, by a wagon at Glass Houghton), I had to leave the force, of course, and I got a very good job as night-watchman at the big glass works. I'm going on duty there now—I can take you with me, and I can put you where nobody'll ever find you, if you don't want to be found."

"But afterwards?" asked Hollins.

"I should suggest a trip to the continent," answered Finney. "I could get you off to Hull or Grimsby easily."

Hollins meditated upon the offer for a few seconds.

"Very well," he answered suddenly, "I'll go with you —we can settle terms after. Look here, have you anything to drink where we're going?"

"I can get aught you'd like, Bill, if you'd give me the money," said the night-watchman.

Hollins put a half-a-sovereign into Finney's outstretched hand.

"Get a couple of bottles of the best Scotch whisky," he said. "And let's be sharp about getting on to your place, Finney—I'm wanting a drink now."

"This way, Bill," said Finney. "Follow me at a little distance."

He turned off in a direction different to that which Hollins, who remembered the situation of the glass works, expected him to take—his wooden leg stumped cheerfully along the road and into the gloom. Hollins kept his old acquaintance in view, and at the same time preserved a sharp look-out for anything in the shape of the enemy. Since he had heard the news which Finney had retailed from the evening paper, he had felt that the air was full of antagonistic forces, and he began to realize what it feels like to be the hunted instead of the hunter.

Finney displayed considerable acumen in getting his man across the little town. He climbed fences, crossed waste pieces of ground, scrambled up a railway embankment, and dodged over the rails at a dark part of the line, and dropped into more waste ground on the other side, wound about through back streets and narrow alleys, and finally brought Hollins out on the side of the river, at a point where a wide wharf ran alongside the looming roofs and chimneys, strange and curious in shape,

of the glass works. It was quiet enough there, and Finney paused under a black wall and let Hollins come up to him.

"Stop here a minute, Bill," he said in a low whisper, "I'm just going round the corner of the street yonder for the whisky. I can get a good brand there."

"I say," said Hollins, "bring something to eat with you—I'm hungry."

"Don't you be afraid, Bill," said the night-watchman. "I'll see you're done to all right—I've my own supper in readiness, and there's more than enough for two."

He went off then, and Hollins waited behind the brick wall until he came back with a parcel under his arm and stumped away on foot again with a whispered word to come on. It was now very dark—and a light rain was falling, the wind came cold and damp from the river, and Hollins, catching a glimpse of its blackness now and then in the gleam of light which came from an occasional cottage window, felt that his surroundings were by no means pleasant, and that life was wearing a dull and uninviting aspect. He thought of the comfort and luxury of the hotel at Birmingham wherein he had found shelter the previous night; of the warmth of the smoking-room, the ease of the padded chairs, the flavour of the cigars he had smoked, the excellence of the spirit he had drunk. And he suddenly realized, with a curious sensation of fear and loneliness, that he would not dare to walk into that hotel, or any other public place tonight, or for some nights to come. Despite all his precautions the murder was out and justice was on his track.

Finney stopped near the great gates of the glass works, and after some fumbling with a key unlocked a door in

the wall and motioned Hollins to step inside. As the door closed behind them, Finney laid his hand on his companion's arm, guiding him along the wall until they came to what appeared in the darkness to be a small cottage which had the high wall for its exterior at the rear, and faced into the yard that opened away into the darkness in front. Here Finney unlocked another door, bade Hollins step within and drew him along a dark passage into a room lighted only by the glow of a carefully backed-up fire. He struck a match and lighted a gas jet that hung from the roof. Hollins looked round him and found himself standing in the midst of a comfortably furnished living room. He glanced anxiously at the curtained window.

"Don't be afraid, my lad," said Finney, with a reassuring nod. "That window is shuttered, as well as blinded and curtained, and there isn't an eye made that could see through it. Just let me fasten the other door, and then we'll have our suppers and be comfortable. I don't go my first rounds for a good hour yet."

He stumped off and fastened the door, came back, pointed out an easy chair on the hearth to Hollins, and stirred the fire into a bright and cheery glow. Then he uncorked one of the bottles of whisky, and set it with a glass and a jug of water at Hollins's elbow.

"Nay," said Hollins. "Two glasses, mate; we'll drink together."

"Well, just a drop then," replied Finny, "to drink your health. Whoa, my lad—that's about my 'lowance until a bit later on. Well, here's to you."

Hollins poured himself out a liberal supply of the spirit—Finney noticed the quantity in one sharp glance

out of the corner of his eye and drew his own conclusions. He began making preparations for supper; in the midst of them he paused and drew out a newspaper from his pocket.

"You'd perhaps like to see the *Evening Post* while I get the supper ready, Bill?" he said. "There's a bit inside, and a good deal on the last page."

Hollins drank off his whisky, helped himself to more, and opened the paper with trembling hands. He found the bit to which his host had referred—it was a brief paragraph about his disappearance, and affected him in no way, he had already read its substance in the morning newspapers. But the "good deal" on the last page turned him sick with fear—so sick that the paper almost fell from his hands. Everything had gone wrong, everything was against him. They had gone out searching for Lloyd; they had repaired to the plateau where he and Lloyd had watched by Vassalli's body, a dog which they had taken with them had sniffed at the rocks on the edge of the fissure; the fissure itself had been explored, and the body of Lloyd, with the head battered out of shape, had been recovered. And now all the hounds of justice were in full cry after William Hollins.

William Hollins was very miserable. He cursed himself, and he cursed Lloyd—he was in the mood for cursing everybody. But as that did no good he drank whisky instead. Finney saw that he was upset and bided his time—he soon set out upon the table a supper, which consisted of hot rabbit-pie and baked potatoes, gooseberry tart and Dutch cheese, and he invited his guest to draw up his chair and fall to. Hollins responded with but a poor grace; he was surly and dull, and by no means

good company, and he sometimes let his knife and fork drop, and stared at his host as if he did not quite know what to make of him. After supper he wanted hot grog, and had it in considerable quantities, and Finney feared that he would get drunk and make a scene. But Hollins became quieter and quieter as the evening progressed and the first bottle of whisky waned, and he finally went to bed, in a small chamber opening out of the living room, in a peaceable state of mind, carrying the second bottle of whisky with him.

"Tell you everything in the morning, Finney, ol' frien'!" He said a little drunkenly. "I'll see you're right, Finney—I'll make it worth your while—you trust me for that—it's a big thing."

Finney locked him in his room and went his rounds. When he came back he listened at Hollins's door and heard nothing. Later on he listened again and fancied he detected the unmistakable sound of snoring. He was satisfied with that, and glad Hollins took his liquor so quietly.

At eight in the morning Finney stumped into his guest's room and called him. He got no reply and stumped up to the bed. Hollins lay there as dead as a door nail. The second whisky bottle, quite empty, lay in the crook of his arm.

CHAPTER VI

THE FURNACE IN THE GLASS WORKS

Mr. Stafford Finney's first action in discovering that his friend Mr. William Hollins was dead was strikingly characteristic of Mr. Stafford Finney's particular virtues and qualities as a man. He walked quietly back to the door, took the key out of the lock on the other side, transferred it to his own side of the door, and locked himself in with the corpse. Then he went back to the bed and re-examined the body, but only in a superficial fashion, just sufficient to convince himself that Hollins was really dead, and while he did so he ruminated in a quiet fashion.

"No one who had seen Bill on the drink last night," mused Mr. Finney, "could possibly feel surprised to hear of Bill's death from drink. He drank all but about a wineglass of the contents of two bottles of whisky, and he put in precious little water with it. The strange thing is that he didn't get fighting mad. But he was not a bit like that—I never saw a more lamb-like drunkard. Certainly he went off very peaceful in the end. I hadn't bargained in offering Bill hospitality to provide for his dead body, but I suppose something will have to be done with him. Of that, however, we'll think a little later on, and at present I should like to know what Bill has about him."

The late Mr. Hollins retired to rest in simple fashion. He had certainly divested himself of his coat and his

waistcoat, which lay carelessly thrown upon the floor, but the rest of his habiliments, including his boots, still remained upon him. Finney picked up the coat and examined it first, finding nothing but an empty spirit flask, a tobacco pouch, a pipe, and a box of wax matches, evidently purchased from a Bristol tobacconist. Finney shook his head.

"He was careless, was Bill," he said. "He didn't destroy his tracks as he should have done—he shouldn't have let folk have the chance of knowing that he'd been to Bristol." Then he turned to the waistcoat and found some evidence of Bill's carelessness in the shape of a left-luggage ticket, made out at Derby, where Hollins, thinking he was doing a wise thing, had deposited his portmanteau containing the old tweed suit which he had replaced by a new one at Bristol. Finney shook his head again.

"Bristol to Derby," said he. "It wouldn't ha' been hard work to track Bill."

He laid the waistcoat aside and began to examine the body. The pockets of the dead man's trousers yielded little more than a pound or two in loose silver and copper, a bunch of keys, and one or two insignificant odds and ends. But when Finney had turned the body over he found that Hollins had a deep and convenient pocket at the back of the hips, and from this he drew a small canvas bag which, on examination, proved to contain two five pound Bank of England notes and twenty-eight pounds in gold, in sovereigns and half-sovereigns, together with some papers which showed that Hollins had three hundred pounds invested in the Bradford Third Equitable Building Society.

"One might say," mused Finney, "that Bill was in what is termed prosperous circumstances."

He replaced money and papers in the bag, and transferred the latter to a safe receptacle on his own person. He was not at all impressed by what he had found, and he remembered Hollins's drunkenly grave remark of the previous night that it was a big thing, and he believed that there was more to be found on Hollins's body. And presently he found it, and the discovery made his face grave and sombre, and set him a-thinking in earnest and steady fashion.

Accustomed to the tricks of men who had knocked about in the world, Finney knew that whatever Hollins had of great value upon him would be carried in a belt worn next his skin round his waist. He felt for such a belt when he had finished examining the clothing, and found it, just as he had expected, and he quickly undid the clasps which secured it and drew it away from the dead man's middle. It was a plain belt of admirably soft elastic webbing with a pouch attached to it over the left hip—from the pouch Finney drew forth the necklace of diamonds. He knew, as he handled them, that he was touching the prize for which Hollins had contended with Lloyd, and that their history, whatever it might be, was mixed up with murder.

Finney was a shrewd, sharp, cool and calculating Yorkshireman. He had been a soldier, and had earned a good record. He had been a policeman after leaving the army, and had got on very well in the force until accident had relieved him of a leg. His character for probity, zealous and careful discharge of his duties, and general trustworthiness secured him his place as night-watchman

at the glass-works, where he was much respected by his employers and their managers, who never had any fault to find with him, and knew him, after three and a half years' experience, as a conscientious servant who never drank, and could be fully relied upon to discharge his duties in a capable way. To them, who only knew him as trusted servant, Finney showed no vices; they were unaware, being folk who saw little of him save in his role of faithful watch-dog, that he had two great vices —avarice and cupidity. In point of fact, the night-watchman was one of those human octopuses who stretch out innumerable arms through the sea of life and catch at whatever they can, and who furthermore never allow anything around which their tentacles wind to escape until something, however much, however little, has been squeezed from it. And Finney was a man who led something of a double life; he was known as the dependable, conscientious night-watchman at the glass-works to everybody in the place, but nobody knew that he was a money-lender, with the rapacity of a shark and the relentlessness of a tiger. He employed a half-starved, badly-paid clerk as cover, whose manners were so mild that the folk who dealt with him wondered at his hardness, and through him he squeezed money right and left out of the small tradesfolk who borrowed it and fell into his clutches.

Such a man it was into whose hands the diamonds now passed. He had seen such things before and was in a better way to estimate their value than either Lloyd or Hollins. He knew that the necklace represented a large, perhaps a vast amount of money, and he would have given a fair percentage of whatever it might be to

know the necklace's history. He had read the newspaper accounts of the remarkable chain of murders in South Devonshire, of the disappearance of the two warders, and of the finding of Lloyd's body, but there was no mention of diamonds in any of them, and he came to the conclusion that the existence of the necklace was unknown to the authorities or the newspaper reporters.

Finney was not the man to relinquish anything of value that fell into his hands without making an effort to retain it. He knew that chance had placed a fortune in his power, and he there and then determined that it should not easily be taken from him. He had no fear whatever of a search being made for Hollins on his premises—he was certain beyond the shadow of a doubt that no one had recognized the ex-warder at the station, or in the outskirts of the town by which he had guided him, or had seen him admitted by himself to the glass-works yard. So assured was Finney of absolute safety in this respect that he wasted no time in thinking of the matter. There were other and more important matters to think of at that moment, and he gave himself up to thinking of them.

The first was the immediate disposal of the diamonds. Finney, under another name, kept a banking account at Leeds, ten miles away, with a firm who believed him to be a respectable one-legged gentleman possessed of house-property, and did not know that the considerable sums he paid into his account were the proceeds of usury. His bankers kept various little matters for him under lock and key; Finney determined that the diamonds, hidden from sight in a carefully sealed parcel, should be

deposited with them next day. For the present he wrapped them up in an old flannel shirt and laid them in a hiding-place of his own which it was extremely unlikely that anybody but himself could find.

So far, so good,—the diamonds were in a fair way to be his, but what of the disposal of Hollins's body? He looked at the poor house of clay as it lay on the bed, and felt by no means well-disposed towards its late tenant. And then, with the coolness characteristic of him, he locked the door upon the bedroom and its contents and set to work to prepare his breakfast. While he ate and drank Finney considered the question of ridding himself of the thing in the next room. At first he thought that he would go to the police-station, tell the inspector that Hollins had come to him late at night, begging for shelter, and had died suddenly during the night. That would shift the responsibility of dealing with the body from his own shoulders to those of the authorities. He could say that he did not know that Hollins was wanted for murder, and thus escape any charge of collusion with the dead man. But a moment's reflection convinced him that this plan would certainly be attended by unpleasant consequences. All sorts of questions would be asked; the body would be examined; there would be a coroner's inquest; his employers would certainly have something to say to him as to harbouring folk on their premises who had no business to be there. Furthermore, he would be obliged to put back into Hollins's pockets at least some considerable portion of the money which he had abstracted from them, and to that part of the proceedings he had a strong natural objection. He decided that what-

ever else happened he must keep the fact that Hollins lay dead in the next room a profound secret.

What, then, was to be done? It was impossible to keep a dead man in the house for an indefinite period—Hollins must certainly be buried within the next twenty-four hours. But where and how?—Finney suddenly realized that nothing is so difficult to dispose of as a human body, which, unlike that of a dog or cat, cannot be thrown upon the nearest dust heap.

The notion of casting the body into the river occurred to him first. The river was but a few yards away from his cottage—he would have nothing to do but to drag the body out there at night, weight it, and throw it over the wharf. But he remembered as soon as this expedient crossed his mind that bodies that are thrown into rivers have a nasty trick of coming to the surface at unexpected moments, and that if they present themselves with weights attached to them questions are sure to be asked and inquiries instituted. It was quite true that he might easily throw Hollins's body into the river, equally true that the theory probably evolved by its subsequent discovery there would be that the man had come back to his native place and had fallen over the wharf, or wherever he might happen to be found, in the darkness or in a state of intoxication, but it was also true that some strange things would be said if the body were discovered without a penny in its pockets. Finney knew the difficulties which arose in matters of this sort, and was keenly aware of the danger which lie in possibilities. If Hollins's body was drawn out of the river some little thing that he had never thought of, however carefully he might think, might connect him with it, and that dire events

spring from trivial causes Finney was as well advised as any man living.

He rose from his breakfast—a substantial meal to which he had done ample justice—still perplexed as to his procedure, and only certain of one thing—that he must get rid of Hollins's body. Lighting a pipe and sitting down by his hearth to think matters out he suddenly called to mind a book which lay hidden away in the cupboard—a book in which some diligent compiler had gathered together a vast amount of material relative to crime of all descriptions. He got it down from a dust-covered shelf, and turned to a chapter wherein was set forth a description of the various methods and expedients resorted to by murderers in the effort to rid themselves of the bodies of their victims. He read several pages, and thought that most murderers must be men of small imaginations and no invention, so clumsy did their actions in disposing of the evidences of their crimes seem to him. But, then, he reflected, they were probably dazed and excited by their guilt—he, Finney, had no guilt upon his soul. He had rather the comfortable reflection that he had done the dead man a kindness. And then, quite suddenly, he remembered that if Hollins's body did come to light, and if awkward questions were asked, and if he were mixed up with the matter, he would be suspected of being a murderer, though murderer he was none. Nobody would believe him, whatever he might say—the mere making away with a body was quite sufficient to damn one unutterably. This thought made him all the more resolute in his determination to rid himself securely of the corpse which cumbered his bed. The only plan he could think of that seemed at all feasible was to

bury Hollins in the room in which he had died. But there were many drawbacks to that—first, the bother and difficulty of taking up the boarded floor and excavating the ground; secondly, the danger that some one would hear the noise of pick and shovel, and insist on knowing what was going on; and third, the chance that some future occupant of the cottage or its owners might take a fancy to carry out new drainage operations. That plan would not do—he put the book back in the cupboard, locked up the cottage, and went out into the yard of the glass works to think still further.

Strolling about the works in a casual fashion, Finney was suddenly confronted by the answer to his question. He had walked, in pure absent-mindedness, close to one of the great furnaces, from which sweating glass blowers were drawing out molten glass, and as he glanced at the licking flames, which showed through the furnace-holes, he realized what he had got to do. There was just one hour of the loneliest part of the night between the going of one shift and coming of another, when the care of the furnaces devolved upon him—if he could throw Hollins's body into that pit of liquid fire it would be consumed in such a fashion that not even a toe-nail of it would remain. He remembered the fate of a workman who fell into one of the furnaces, and of whom not a trace could be found when the molten mass was cooled off. If Hollins were thrown into a furnace he would be literally consumed, flesh and bone, within a few seconds.

Finney had now found the solution of his problem. Hollins and everything about him, always excepting the money and the diamonds,—should make a disappearance through the medium of liquid fire, and the deed should

be done that very night. He lost no time in setting to work. He went back to his cottage, regarded Hollins attentively, and came to the conclusion that he was a man of about fourteen stones in weight. He locked up the cottage once more, stumped into the town, and returned an hour or two later with a large, stoutly fashioned sack. Into this sack, during the afternoon, Finney, working with closed doors and windows, packed the dead man and every scrap of his belongings. And somewhere about midnight he managed, being an individual of great muscular power, to get the load on his back, to cross the yard, and to climb a plank that led to an opening in the brickwork overlooking the furnace. He was balancing himself on the very edge of this, preparatory to swinging his burden into the glowing mass of molten fire, twenty feet beneath, when a voice, harsh, strident, astonished, fell upon his ears from the darkness beyond him.

"Hallo, Finney! What the devil art ta doin' theer?"

The stump of Finney's wooden leg slipped on the brickwork, the weight of the dead man's body pulled him sideways; the man coming out of the darkness heard the night-watchman utter a piercing yell of agony, and saw him stretch unavailing arms to the stars as he and his burden fell into the hell of fire that reached out licking arms to receive the dead and the living.

EPISODE THE THIRD

THE MILLINER AND THE IRISH MAIL

CHAPTER I

THE LATE MR. FINNEY'S EFFECTS

HALF-WAY along the principal street of Castleford there might have been found at that time a small, and, as regards its size, an unpretentious, but eminently respectable-looking establishment, which bore over its plate glass window a sign bearing the name and style of *Teresa Driscoll, Milliner and Dressmaker*. Certain exterior signs showed that the proprietress had notions of her own. The door and windows of the shop were painted in a rich green colour, and presumably as a delicate complement to the tenant's nationality: there was a handsome brass knocker on the one and smart Liberty blinds and curtains on the other—Miss Driscoll, moreover, showed distinct inclinations to taste in the fact that the window, instead of being crowded out with hats, bonnets, and similar matters, contained but two confections in the shape of toques, which had a truly Parisienne air, and communicated a *chic* appearance to their surroundings. A similar air of chaste superiority to the general run of provincial millinery establishments was noticeable on passing the green door with the brass knocker—the walls were smartly papered and in excellent taste, there was no disfiguring counter and no cane bottom chairs, but in their stead a comfortable lounge or two and an old oak table; a soft carpet covered the floor, and the long mirrors on the walls might have come out of a well-appointed *salon*. It was plain to whosoever entered

Miss Driscoll's establishment for the first time that its proprietress was one of those persons who not only have ideas of their own but know how to carry those ideas out.

On the afternoon of the day whereon Mr. Finney had the ill-luck to fall into the tank of molten glass—an accident which immediately removed him from this poor world in such a complete fashion that there was not the least chance of even the buttons on his clothes or the boots on his feet ever being seen again—Miss Driscoll sat in her shop, turning over a new hat which had just been brought down to her from the workroom overhead, where two or three young women worked together under the direction of Miss Driscoll's forewoman. Miss Driscoll, seen in the act of criticizing the work just delivered for her approbation, revealed herself as a tall, well-built, very well preserved woman of forty years of age, and of the sort that are in their own particular way quite as attractive to men as a girl of twenty. She was eminently Irish in appearance, being possessed of the wonderful grey, long-lashed eyes, graceful figure and peach-like complexion which fortunately distinguishes so many of her country-women, and that she had known few cares in her life, and was gifted with the light-heartedness of her race was evident from the fact that there was not a suspicion of a grey hair about the glossy coil of black that was gracefully arranged around her shapely head. It was said by everybody who knew her that Miss Driscoll was an uncommonly fine woman, and everybody wondered how it was that she had never married.

At this time Miss Driscoll had been settled in Castleford in her tasteful little shop and in the rooms over-

head for the space of six years, and everybody knew how it was that she had settled there. For several years before she had opened the shop Miss Driscoll had been in service as lady's maid to the old Countess of Pryde, at Hawkesford Park, close by the town, and it was well known, or at any rate shrewdly suspected, that she had feathered her nest pretty well during her period of servitude, and had been handsomely remembered in Lady Pryde's will. At any rate, after Lady Pryde's death her maid had opened the milliner's shop, which was now an institution of the town, and had spent a good deal in embellishing and fitting it. All the ladies of the neighbourhood had given their patronage to Miss Driscoll at an early period of her embarkation on the sea of business, and her fellow-tradesfolk used to wag their heads and say that the lady knew what she was after, and must be putting by a pretty penny.

As a matter of fact, Miss Driscoll was one of these women who have an aim and an object in life. Her father, an Irishman who owned a small property on the banks of the Shannon, between Limerick and Castle Connell, a corner of the world which possesses peculiar beauty in the way of river scenery, had contrived by a strict devotion to the wine of the country, to so neglect his affairs that bankruptcy and ruin had come upon him when his daughter—who was also his only child—was a girl of one-and-twenty. He himself had then died, having had quite enough of the world in general and far too much Irish whisky in particular. His daughter, a high-spirited girl who had kept her hunter, her dogs, her gun, and her rod, and made use of all of them with dexterity and

great enjoyment to herself, had found the world open to her, and her own pocket quite empty. She had seen the old place sold, and heard the growls, curses, and cries of creditors whose claims were not satisfied even when all had been sacrificed, and she had sworn a solemn oath, that she would neither rest, nor take her pleasure, until she had earned sufficient money to pay off her father's outstanding debts, and if possible to buy back Castle Cleerycrow. After that she departed from those parts, and within a week or two nobody but a few old servants remembered her. She had now been away from her native land for nineteen years, and she still steadily worked towards the point of her ambition. What was more, she knew that she would attain it. First as lady's maid, then as milliner, Miss Driscoll had saved every penny that she could, and she knew that in another ten years' time she would have enough money to pay off the Driscoll debts, buy back the old place, and set herself up for life there in a comfortable way. She would then be fifty, and the best part of her life would be gone, but she would have achieved her object.

Miss Driscoll was thinking of none of these things on this particular afternoon. She had always found it the best policy to think of one thing at once, and all her attention was being given at that moment to the work which had just been sent down for her examination. Something in its execution or composition did not quite please her, and she was about to take it up to the workroom herself when the outer door of the shop opened, and a tall, rosy-cheeked, generously-framed man entered, in whom Miss Driscoll recognized Mr. Bexendale, a well-known solicitor.

"Good-afternoon, ma'am," said Mr. Bexendale, with a very low bow.

"Good-afternoon, sir," answered Miss Driscoll, wondering if Mr. Bexendale had come to order a new bonnet for his wife.

"I have called upon you, Miss Driscoll," said Mr. Bexendale, as he slowly removed his gloves, "on a business matter of great importance to yourself. I have news for you, ma'am, which, I can assure you, most people would rejoice to hear. Can I speak to you in privacy, Miss Driscoll?"

The milliner, greatly wondering at this announcement, led the way into a small parlour at the back of the shop, closed the door, motioned Mr. Bexendale to a seat on one side of the table, took another herself, and turned to the solicitor with eyes of expectancy.

"Ma'am," said Mr. Bexendale, "I have an announcement to make which I am sure you will hail with satisfaction, gratification, and interest, even though it arouses feelings of a regretful and painful nature. I believe, Miss Driscoll, that you had some acquaintance with my late client, Mr. Stafford Finney?"

"Late?" exclaimed the milliner. "What!—is the man dead, then?"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bexendale. "Have you not heard the sad news, ma'am—I thought everybody in the town knew of it—it's the gossip of the day."

"That's just why I haven't heard it, then," replied Miss Driscoll. "I hate gossip. I won't have it in my shop or workroom, and none of the girls dare to introduce it —this is a working establishment. But what is the news, if it's about Finney?"

"My dear madam," said Mr. Bexendale, soothingly, as if he feared that Miss Driscoll might faint or show great signs of distress. "Death comes to one and all. Our late friend——"

"He was no friend of mine, that I know of," exclaimed Miss Driscoll.

"We do not always know our friends," observed Mr. Bexendale sententiously. "Our late friend," he continued, "is no more. He met a terrible, but I believe, from expert testimony, a very swift and, therefore, painless death—he fell—Miss Driscoll, into a cauldron of molten glass at the glass works where he was employed as night-watchman, and was, of course, instantly killed. They tell me," said Mr. Bexendale, edging his chair a little closer and dropping his voice to a more confidential whisper, "they tell me, ma'am, that even now the very buttons on his clothing and the wire work on his wooden leg would be consumed within an incredibly short space of time—such is the terrible power of the heat."

"Will he work up into glass bottles?" asked Miss Driscoll.

Mr. Bexendale lifted his hands.

"Not a vestige of him remains, ma'am," he replied.

"Then that," said Miss Driscoll, "is the complete end of the man?"

"Absolutely complete," murmured the solicitor.

Miss Driscoll regarded her visitor with a meditative air.

"Well," said she, "and what has all this to do with me?"

"Much, my dear madam," replied Mr. Bexendale. "Your deceased friend——"

"Stop," said Miss Driscoll, interrupting the solicitor with lifted hand. "What's the use of using terms that don't apply. Finney was no friend of mine—all I know of him was just this—he happened a few years ago to have a rather bad fall in the street opposite my shop, and I had him brought in and attended to, and I think he was a little smitten——"

"Very much so, ma'am, and with reason," murmured Mr. Bexendale, rubbing his hands and smiling.

"Anyway," continued Miss Driscoll, "he wrote me two or three very queer, eccentric letters, asking me to marry him, which was, of course, quite out of the question. I don't see," she concluded, rubbing her chin with a meditative air, "I don't see that you could call him a friend just because of that."

"Anybody is a friend who does one a friendly action," said Mr. Bexendale. "Mr. Finney, ma'am, has *proved* his friendship for you."

"How?" asked Miss Driscoll, still puzzled and wondering.

Mr. Bexendale leaned across the table, looked at his *vis-à-vis* with great impressment, and breathed the momentous announcement in a triumphant whisper.

"He has left you everything he had!"

The effect of this news upon Miss Driscoll was remarkable. Up to that point she had listened to Mr. Bexendale with some signs of impatience, as if she thought him wasteful of her valuable time; now, however, she assumed a business-like air and her attitude underwent an entire change. She rose from her seat without a word, walked over to the door, opened it, stepped outside into the shop and called upstairs.

"Miss Brice!"

A voice replied from above.

"Yes, Miss Driscoll."

"Miss Brice, I'm engaged in my sitting-room, and am not to be disturbed. If you hear the shop bell come down yourself. And don't interrupt me on any account."

"Very well, Miss Driscoll."

Then the milliner came back, closed the door, and resumed her seat. But this time her look was earnest and her tone brisk, as she confronted the man of law.

"Now, then, Mr. Bexendale," she said, "tell me all about it. You say the poor fellow has left me all his money?"

"Here, ma'am, is the will—executed three months ago," answered the solicitor, producing a legal looking document. "It is a very simple will—Finney had no relations, and he devises everything of which he was possessed to you absolutely."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to him," said Miss Driscoll. "And pray how much might he have to leave—not much, I expect?"

Mr. Bexendale coughed behind his hand. He drew out another paper from his pocket, put on a pair of gold-framed pince-nez, and glanced the paper over.

"Well, ma'am," said he, "the truth is, my late client was about as cute a man as any person I ever knew. His night-watchmanship was a mere nothing—in real truth Finney had a money-lending business, which he ran under the name of Crowther—you've heard of it, I dare say—and he had done well out of it. I am not absolutely certain," continued Mr. Bexendale, as he scrutinized his paper, "but I think I may say that there

will be at least twenty thousand pounds—not less, at any rate."

A sudden vision flashed across Miss Driscoll's mind—a vision of Castle Cleerycrow, with the Shannon flowing beneath the grey wall and green lawns, a vision of the old debts paid off, and the family honour restored. She rose and paced rapidly across the little parlour, and it was with an effort that she retained her composure.

"I can't help feeling this, Mr. Bexendale," she said, looking at the solicitor with glistening eyes. "I've been working ever since I was a girl of twenty-one in order to pay off old family debts, and it would have taken me ten years longer to do it. Now I can do it at once—thanks to that poor fellow's generosity—and if it's all true."

"It's as true as the blessed Gospel, Miss Driscoll," returned Mr. Bexendale. "It may take a few weeks to settle everything, but your fortune will very soon be in your hands. And the amount I mentioned is the lowest estimate of it—I should say the full value is nearer twenty-five than twenty thousand."

"I shall be obliged if you will act for me, Mr. Bexendale," said Miss Driscoll. "Perhaps, if I call upon you in a day or two, you'll explain everything."

"My services, ma'am, are at your command," replied the solicitor. "There is one matter which needs immediate attention. The glass works people need the cottage which my late client used, and they want the furniture to be cleared out. As the furniture is now yours, you had better look it over and give Brown, the auctioneer, an order to remove and sell it. It's of no use to you."

Miss Driscoll concurred in this suggestion, and said

that she would walk round to the glass works that night, inspect the property, and give instructions as to its disposal. Mr. Bexendale thereupon shook hands with her three times, congratulated her more fervently than ever, and took his leave.

CHAPTER II

MISS DRISCOLL FINDS THE DIAMONDS

About seven o'clock that evening Miss Driscoll, who, during the process of taking tea alone in her parlour had thought of many things, and had resolved several lines of conduct, left her establishment to the care of the general servant, and set out for the cottage in the yard of the glass works in order to inspect the late Mr. Finney's household effects. She walked quickly through the town and along the river side to the glass works wharf: at the side door by which Finney had admitted himself and Hollins to his place on the previous evening, she followed out certain instructions given her by Mr. Bexendale and rang the bell. The summons was presently responded to by a man who, at sight of Miss Driscoll, stepped back, held the door open, and invited her to enter.

"I promised Mr. Bexendale that I would call this evening in order to look over the furniture left by poor Finney," said Miss Driscoll, in explanation of her presence.

"Yes'm," said the man. "Mr. Bexendale sent round to tell me. I'm the new watchman in Finney's place."

"I hope you'll not meet with a similar fate," said Miss Driscoll.

"I'll take good care o' that, ma'am!" replied the new night-watchman with considerable confidence. "If

Finney hadn't been up to some queer game or other he'd have slept in his own bed tonight."

"What game was he up to, then?" asked Miss Driscoll.

"Nay, that's what nobody'll ever know," answered the man. "But he'd no business where he was, nor to do what he was doing."

"Why, what was he doing?" asked Miss Driscoll, who, as sole residuary legatee of the departed, felt rather more than ordinary curiosity as to Finney's last deeds. "I thought he fell into the tank by accident."

The new night-watchman, who was comfortably attired in his shirt sleeves, a sure sign that he was enjoying the evening in a luxurious state of ease, and who had a short clay pipe in full blast, spat on the cinders at his feet in a fashion that bespoke him a true philosopher.

"Why, so he did in the end," he replied, "but what had he gone there for? What I say is just this here, ma'am, that there was a considerable amount o' mystery about our departed friend's latter end. Joe Clarke it was as see it happen, and Joe Clarke has been drinkin' all day to sort o' forget what it was he seen. I'll lay out that if you was to walk into the bar parlour o' the 'Green Man,' just across the wharf there, 'at you'd find Joe Clarke telling the story for the hundredth time this blessed day, and maybe colouring it a bit, 'cos of the drink he's taken very free. But I heard Joe Clarke tell what he seen within ten minutes of the time when he seen it."

"And what did Joe Clarke see?" asked Miss Driscoll.

"What Joe Clarke seen," answered the new night-watchman, "was this here. He comes into the yard at

a time when he hadn't no call to be there, and gets in by a way only known to him and a few of his pals, his motive being to have a sleep in a warm corner of the kiln, him having been out Ledsham way, doing a bit of a poaching expedition, and not wantin' to knock up his old woman at unreasonable hours, and he sees Finney carrying a heavy sack up the planks to a spot overlooking one of the kilns and a trying to sling the sack over into the pot, and he calls out to him and axes what he was doing there, and Finney turns sharp round to speak to him, or seemingly to do so, and he slips on his wooden leg and over the whole lot goes, sack and everything. And Joe Clarke, he says, that Finney gave one yell that he'll hear to his dying day, and that's why he's been trying to get drunk all day at the 'Green Man'—an' I reckon it'll take some doing, for he's fair upset i' his mind by what he'd seen and heard, is Joe Clarke."

"What could he have in the sack?" said Miss Driscoll speculatively. "Something that he wanted to destroy, I should think."

"Summat o' that sort, no doubt," answered the night-watchman. "But Lord sakes, who'll be able to tell—there's nowt 'at ever went into one o' them pots o' metal 'at ever come out—it's like hell itself in one o' them, axin' your pardon, ma'am."

"I should like," said Miss Driscoll, "to see the place where the accident occurred—the place where Finney fell in, you know. Is it possible to do so?"

"Not the exact spot, ma'am, it isn't," answered the night-watchman, "cause the maister had it bricked in this morning. But I can give you a peep at poor Finney's sepulchre, as you might call it, in a way of speaking,

through one of the drawholes, if you'll step this way."

Miss Driscoll followed her obliging guide across the yard to one of the curiously shaped buildings, at whose architecture she had often wondered on the occasions whereon she had taken her walks abroad in the country, and had gazed back at the town from some slight eminence. She found herself under a sort of shed high above which rose a species of sugar loaf shaped chimney, at the base of which was the furnace, access to which was gained by a number of small holes, now protected by iron doors. Although these doors were all shut, the heat which penetrated brick and iron was terrible in its fierceness, and Miss Driscoll found herself gasping for breath.

"What fearful heat!" she said. "Do the men work in this?"

"This is nowt," said the night-watchman, "to what it is when all the drawhole doors is open. Here, take hold of this, ma'am, and shade your face with it."

He handed Miss Driscoll a square of thick blue glass, set in a wood frame to which was attached a holder. When she had placed this protection before her face in the desired way the night-watchman seized an iron rod which lay handy to open the door of the drawhole.

"There," he said. "If that ain't like what they tells you at chapel about the bottomless pit I don't know what is!"

Such a burst of heat as Miss Driscoll could not have imagined puffed out of the drawhole and seemed to take her breath away. She kept her position bravely, and, peering through the protecting blue glass, looked inside the furnace. What she saw seemed to her the very incarnation of the spirit of fire—a molten, seething mass of

metal, glowing at white heat, with subtle wicked-looking, curling flames twisting and darting over its surface. The mere thought of what must happen to a human being who fell into such a sea of living flame made Miss Driscoll shudder, and a sudden feeling of nausea came over her. She stepped hastily back and dropped the blue glass.

"It's awful," she said, shuddering again while the night-watchman closed the door of the drawhole. "I couldn't have conceived it. What a terrible fate."

"Ah," said the night-watchman laconically, "if you'd to drop a coin in there it'd melt up like a lump o' sugar in a cup of tea."

They walked back across the yard to the cottage in silence—Miss Driscoll was meditating upon the generous Finney's hapless fate, the new night-watchman was wondering whether, as he was now to take up his quarters in the cottage, he had better not buy a bit of the furniture there cheap. He broached the matter to Miss Driscoll as they entered the cottage together.

"I did hear from Mr. Bexendale's young man as how Finney has left all his belongings to you, ma'am," he said, by way of introducing the subject. "I expect there's more than one thing in the cottage here that you'll have no use for, and as I'm going to live in it I thought we might make a bit of a bargain."

"I was thinking of selling everything," replied Miss Driscoll. "I don't suppose there is anything at all that I shall require. Anything that you wish to buy you may have at a reasonable price."

Then she stepped into the living room and looked about her at the late Finney's household goods. The

room was pretty much as it had been left by the dead man, for the new night-watchman had not yet entered into possession, and conspicuous amongst the objects which it contained were the two whisky bottles which Mr. Hollins had emptied on his arrival at the harbour of refuge which was to prove his grave. The new night-watchman indicated these, standing side by side on the little table, with an outstretched forefinger and a shake of the head.

"There was a deal of talk about them two spirit bottles this morning, when things came to be looked into," he said. "If them two bottles could talk they could tell more than a bit."

"Why?" asked Miss Driscoll, who saw nothing remarkable in the presence of two empty bottles.

"Why, ma'am! 'Cause Finney, whatever his other faults and vices, as they call them, may ha' been, was never a drinker. Nobody ever saw him take more than a single glass at any time. And yet," continued the new night-watchman, "what's the facts? It came out when they went into things a bit this morning that, night afore last, Finney bought them two bottles o' whisky at Linacre's, and there they were this morning empty. Supped the two on 'em, he had—a strange thing for Finney to do."

Miss Driscoll looked at the bottles once more as folk look at the gruesome objects in police museums. She turned away from them with a feeling that it was just as well that inanimate objects cannot speak.

"Well," she said, "let's see the furniture."

Looking about her, her eyes, quick to recognize anything good, fell on the old bureau in which Finney stored

his papers, and in which at that moment the diamond necklace was safely hidden. It was a pretty specimen of the best work of the Chippendale period, and Miss Driscoll, who had a passion for old furniture, fell in love with it as soon as she saw it.

"I'll keep that myself," she said, and she went over to it and tried the drawers, only to find that they were all locked. "I wonder where the keys are?" she said meditatively.

"Where whatever there might be left o' Finney is, ma'am, I should say," remarked her companion. "Finney would have 'em in his pocket, you may be certain."

Miss Driscoll completed her survey of the rest of the dead man's belongings in one comprehensive glance. With the exception of an old lustre jug, which she immediately took down from its shelf and retained in her hand, there was nothing that she cared to possess.

"That's all that I want," she remarked. "Now show me what you would like to buy and we'll settle that—no, stop—we won't do that, for I haven't time to bother about it. I'll tell the auctioneer to let you keep anything you fancy, at a fair price—then he can cart the rest away."

"Very good, ma'am," said the new occupant. "That'll do for me. And about this old birrou, as you seem to have taken a fancy to?"

Miss Driscoll tapped the top of the bureau with the end of her taper fingers.

"Do you know anybody about here who has such a thing as a strong hand-cart?" she asked. "Because if you do I'll take the bureau away with me tonight."

"Ay," said the man, "there's Tom Metcalfe, just at

the back o' the works, has a good 'un. Shall I slip round and fetch him, ma'am."

"Do, if you please," answered Miss Driscoll. She remained alone in the cottage while the new night-watchman sped on his errand, and by the light of a tallow candle examined the surroundings and wondered a great deal about a great many things. When the men returned with the hand-cart she superintended the removal of the bureau: that done, she presented the late Finney's successor with half-a-crown and told him that she would give strict orders to the auctioneer to be reasonable in the matter of price, and then followed Tom Metcalfe through the town as he conveyed the bureau to the shop with the green door and the Liberty curtains.

When the bureau had been deposited in the shop and its porter dismissed, Miss Driscoll, having made sure that curtains and blinds were duly drawn, produced a large bunch of keys and made careful attempts to open the various drawers. She knew that there would be nothing particularly complicated about any of the locks and it was not very long before she found a key of her own which opened any of the drawers in the bureau, all of which, as she had fully expected, because of her knowledge of such things, were fitted with locks of the same pattern. And this purpose having been effected, Miss Driscoll, who possessed as much curiosity as any of the rest of her sex, proceeded to examine the miscellaneous contents of the bureau.

She found all sorts of odds and ends—papers, account books, clippings from newspapers, scraps of literature which had evidently pleased the dead man and been cut out from all manner of sources, memoranda relating

to various transactions, an old Bible, several flutes, a set of chess men, and a good deal of rubbish, which she determined to consign to the flames or the dust-heap. And without the least expectation of discovering anything valuable, she came upon the diamond necklace.

Miss Driscoll was a practical and a sensible woman —it is true that she could not help uttering a little scream when the stones blazed forth in all their fire and beauty, but she did nothing more than just wrap them up again and carry them into her own parlour, where she was quite free from observation. There she examined them with a long, critical inspection. She knew a good deal about diamonds, for old Lady Pryde's were famous, and her ladyship had educated her maids in the points of good quality and excellence. Miss Driscoll looked carefully at every stone in the necklace, mentally appraising its value, and when she at last wrapped this strange new possession up she said to herself that the diamonds were worth at least fifty thousand pounds.

That night the diamond necklace reposed beneath Miss Driscoll's pillow. It was characteristic of her that, although the events of the day had placed her in possession of a vast and unexpected fortune, she slept as calmly as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER III

MR. BEXENDALE'S PRODIGAL SON

It so happened that the day following that on which the fortune and the diamonds fell into Miss Driscoll's hands, as ripe fruit sometimes falls at the very feet of the unsuspecting stranger, who walks meditatively through an orchard, was a Sunday, and Miss Driscoll was glad of it. She wanted to be quiet, in order that she might carry out a seemingly desirable task and give herself up to severe thought. With these objects in view she gave her maid-of-all-work a whole day's holiday, remarking that she thought Selina looked run down and would be all the better for a rest, and that she herself, having no particular desire for a hot dinner, would dispense with the usual Sunday feast and make out upon a cold lunch. By eleven o'clock Selina had departed, and Miss Driscoll had the house to herself, and she immediately began to carry the seemingly desirable task into effect.

This was nothing more or less than a minute search through all the late Mr. Finney's effects as comprised in the bureau for any document, paper, entry in account or memorandum book, or for any reference whatever to the diamond necklace. She had thought the thing over since early morning, and had determined that Finney must have come into possession of the gems in the way of business. She remembered Mr. Bexendale's statement

that Finney had, in secret, been a money-lender in a rather large way of business—it occurred to her that the diamond necklace had been lodged with him as security for a loan. This theory seemed to her so good a one that she adopted it as the probable explanation of the real truth, and she then naturally wanted to know to whom the diamonds really belonged. It seemed to her that Finney must possess some record of the transaction, and she determined to search his papers and books thoroughly. Hence the dismissal of Selina for the better part of the day.

But though she went through every scrap of paper in the bureau, Miss Driscoll found no reference to the diamonds. She came across a memoranda of curious and interesting transactions in which Finney had figured at one time or another, but across nothing relating to the gems. When she had exhausted the contents of the bureau she was just as wise as ever as regard the question of ownership. The diamond necklace might belong to her, as the late Mr. Stafford Finney's sole residuary legatee, or it might belong to some great personage who had left it with Mr. Finney as security. It was perfectly obvious that it must belong to somebody, said Miss Driscoll to herself: diamond necklaces of a presumable value of fifty thousand pounds do not travel about the world ownerless. If the diamonds had come into Mr. Finney's possession in a legitimate way (and she knew nothing of him that could suggest they did not) and had become his rightful property, why then, they were now hers. That was really the question which Miss Driscoll wanted to settle—were the diamonds hers or were they the property of some other person who might turn up at an awkward

moment and lay claim to them? That was the first matter which claimed Miss Driscoll's attention that Sunday morning. The second was a careful consideration of her future plans. It was quite out of the question that she, who was now a rich woman, should wish to remain longer in a small manufacturing town in Yorkshire, surrounded by coal pits and slag heaps. No—she wanted to go back to her own native land, and to that particular corner of it which she loved best: she wanted to pay off her father's creditors and hold her head high again before folk who had said nasty things about him, and she wanted to do all this as quickly as possible. But there was her business to consider: a good business and a paying one, and Miss Driscoll was far too much of a shrewd and practical woman to forget it. She must make some arrangement about it—sell it or arrange for Miss Brice to carry it on in her name. But, best of all, she would sell it to Brice, if Brice had the money wherewith to buy it. Miss Driscoll resolved that if Brice had not the money, or only part of it she would be easy with her—she would let the purchase money be regarded as a loan, to be paid off according to Brice's ability. What she chiefly desired was to get her affairs settled in England as quickly as possible so that she could return to the banks of the Shannon and carry out the desire of her heart, which had been ever present, ever eager, for close on twenty years.

Miss Driscoll was one of those women who are wise enough to believe that men are much wiser than themselves, and that of all sagacious men the man of law is most sagacious. In pursuance of this belief she repaired during the course of the following afternoon to Mr.

Bexendale's office in order to consult him on the matter of the diamonds and the speedy winding-up of her affairs. She had taken the opportunity earlier in the day of having a little chat with Miss Brice as to the latter's purchase of the business, and had ascertained that there would be no difficulty in arranging that little matter. Miss Brice had been long enough with Miss Driscoll to know that the business yielded very handsome profits, and she was not only willing to buy it outright but to pay cash for the goodwill, fittings, and stock-in-trade; her father, a respectable tradesman, having recently died and left her a fortune of a few hundred pounds. So now there was nothing to detain Miss Driscoll but the actual settling of the late Mr. Finney's affairs, and that she determined to push forward to the best of her ability.

When Miss Driscoll entered Mr. Bexendale's office she was received by Mr. Bexendale's son, a young gentleman who at certain intervals of his life might be found there, discharging the duties of clerk in a perfunctory fashion, but whose absences from even such a mild form of labour were so frequent that no one ever knew whether he might be found at the office or not. It was rather well known in the town that Mr. Bexendale's son was a bad lot. He had betrayed from boyhood a strong propensity to walk in evil ways—he was fond of a fast and vicious life, and he had caused his father rather more trouble than is usually given to parents by a choice assortment of unruly children. It was extremely unfortunate that Mr. Bexendale was a soft-hearted, indulgent, easy-going man who had lost his wife at an early stage of married life, and had not been sensible enough to give the boy a stepmother. The youngster, left to the care of servants, had grown up

as he pleased, done as he pleased, and steadily refused to please anybody else. His father had intended him to follow his own profession, and had placed him at a good school, from which he ran away so often that the authorities at last made it impossible for him to return. He had been duly articled to his father, and was supposed to be reading law at moments when he was playing billiards, attending horse races, or drinking bitter beer in tap-rooms. He had gone up for his preliminary several times with an air of great assurance, and had been ploughed every time. Now, at the age of twenty-two, he was a mere hanger-on at his father's house and office, and there were times when his father did not know where he was, for he would absent himself suddenly, without excuse or reason, and come back just as suddenly, without as much as by-your-leave. In short, Mr. Ninian Bexendale was a thorough young wrecker, who had no principles of any good description and desired nothing but the satisfaction of his own low and selfish vices.

He was by no means an unpleasant looking young man, this good-for-nothing, however, and he received Miss Driscoll with a smile and a bow which she took to be indicative of amiability on his part. He was rather tall and slim of figure, pale of face, with a dark silky moustache that curled about a mouth which indicated selfishness rather than weakness of character, small, crafty eyes, and a general expression of insincerity. Yet he made at first sight a good impression, because he was always very well dressed, and Miss Driscoll looked perhaps more at his clothes than at him. She exchanged a word or two with him as he conducted her to his father's room, and Mr. Ninian Bexendale's tongue was unusually

polite, for he knew all about the Finney will and its results to Miss Driscoll.

Having shown Miss Driscoll into the presence, Mr. Ninian Bexendale executed a singular flank movement. Being one of those persons who like to be fully informed of whatever is going on in their immediate vicinity—such liking invariably springing from a notion that if you only hear a good deal, you will be certain to be able to turn something of it to your own advantage—this young man had sometime previously conceived a brilliant method of overhearing and overseeing all that went on in his father's private office. Mr. Bexendale's house was an ancient one, with many passages, deep cupboards, and similar arrangements in its interior economy —Ninian Bexendale, spying out the land, had discovered a large closet which opened into his father's room on one side and into a disused chamber on the other. He had further ascertained that it was never used for any purpose whatever, being given up, indeed, to a large and dusty accumulation of old deeds, old ledgers, and old paper rubbish in general, none of which was ever wanted, and was therefore never referred to. In the upper panels of the door there were several round holes, presumably placed there for the purpose of ventilation—one of them had been artfully enlarged by Mr. Ninian in such a fashion that it commanded a full view of his father's room. When he had first planned this post of advantage and observation for himself, he had ascertained that the door was locked and the key on his father's side of it—next day, during his senior's absence he took the key from the lock and dropped it into the well in the yard. As for the other door, he took good care that its lock

was well oiled and the key on the right side, so that he could, if he pleased, lock himself in.

It was to this observatory that Ninian Bexendale now swiftly and noiselessly repaired—his movements quite unseen in a house wherein nobody but himself, his father, and two old women servants resided. He was in the cupboard, and his eye was at the peephole almost as soon as Miss Driscoll had seated herself in the chair which Mr. Bexendale with great politeness placed for her near his desk. And from that point forward Ninian commanded all that was said and done.

The first sentences exchanged between solicitor and client were not prolific of much interest to the listener. Miss Driscoll explained that for private reasons of her own she wished to leave the town as soon as possible, and had therefore arranged to sell her business to Miss Brice, her forewoman, and she would ask Mr. Bexendale to draw up the necessary papers. Mr. Bexendale said that this should be done with all dispatch. Then Miss Driscoll said that she would like the late Mr. Finney's affairs to be settled as soon as possible, and Mr. Bexendale replied that he did not think that there need be any great delay. He had gone into the matter that very morning, and he found that things could be settled quickly. A very large amount of Mr. Finney's estate consisted of ready cash lying at his bankers in Leeds; the remainder was in short loans at high percentages, all of which could be called in at once.

"Well, there's another matter I want to consult you about, Mr. Bexendale," said Miss Driscoll. "Out of Mr. Finney's furniture I selected a nice old Chippendale bureau: I'm fond of old furniture, and I thought I should

like to keep it. I found it to be full of papers of Mr. Finney's—old books, documents, and so on. And I found something of value, Mr. Bexendale."

"I shouldn't wonder, ma'am," said the solicitor. "Just what I should have expected of my late client. A roll of bank notes, no doubt?"

"No," answered Miss Driscoll, who believed thoroughly in Mr. Bexendale's good faith, and had decided in her own mind that her best plan was to be perfectly straightforward with her solicitor. "No—a diamond necklace, Mr. Bexendale."

"A diamond necklace? Dear me," said the solicitor. "Now what could Finney be doing with a diamond necklace? Strange thing, indeed. Is the ornament of much value, do you think, ma'am?"

Without replying, Miss Driscoll turned to a small travelling bag of dark green crocodile leather which she had brought with her and had set on the edge of Mr. Bexendale's desk. She opened the clasp, put her hand into the bag, drew it out, and held up the necklace to the solicitor's wondering gaze.

"God bless my soul, ma'am," gasped Mr. Bexendale. "Do—do you think they're real?"

"I know they're real," said Miss Driscoll with great emphasis. "Lady Pryde taught me all that an amateur can know of diamonds. I know they're real, Mr. Bexendale, and I can tell you within a few hundreds of what they're worth. Fifty thousand pounds."

"Fifty thousand pounds. God bless me! And found in Finney's bureau. What a marvellous thing!" said the solicitor, in a burst of exclamation. "How do you account for it, ma'am."

"Well, Mr. Bexendale, I've formed my own theory," replied Miss Driscoll. "I've searched high and low, but I can't find a scrap of writing that refers to these diamonds. My notion is that Finney either acquired them in payment of a debt, or that they're in pledge to him for a loan."

"Excellent, ma'am, excellent. That must be the explanation," said Mr. Bexendale. "And what do you propose to do in the matter?"

"Simply this," replied Miss Driscoll: "If Finney took them in payment of a debt, these diamonds are now my sole property, by law. If he held them as security for a loan, why, then, the person to whom they belong must produce evidence of it to me, and pay me the amount of the loan, and interest. Otherwise, Mr. Bexendale"—here Miss Driscoll put the necklace back into the bag and snapped the clasp—"otherwise, I shall stick to the diamonds."

"Well, my dear madam," said Mr. Bexendale, "I must say that I think you're quite right in your statement of the legal position, though it's a pity there's no memoranda of any transaction. But, goodness gracious! you're not going to keep fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds in the house with you?"

"No," replied Miss Driscoll. "Now that I've seen you I am going straight to the bank to have the necklace locked up safely until the morning I leave for Ireland. Then I'll put the package into this bag and secure it to my waist by a thin steel chain—you can trust me to take care of anything that's valuable, Mr. Bexendale. And now you'll hurry matters forward as quickly as you can, won't you?"

Mr. Bexendale once more promised to do his best in every way, and Miss Driscoll departed, carrying the green bag with her. When she had gone Ninian Bexendale quietly left his hiding-place, went downstairs, put on his overcoat and hat, told the boy in the outer office that he wouldn't be back that afternoon, and strolled away in the direction of the Station Hotel. He took a meditative drink at the bar there, and then crossed to the station and bought a ticket for Leeds.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTRIVING OF A CONSPIRACY

Mr. Ninian Bexendale, as he journeyed towards Leeds, was conscious that his mind was torn by many conflicting emotions. It was not a great mind, that which lay concealed somewhere within the convolutions of his brain, but it was an exceedingly acute one, especially when its possessor saw the slightest chance of benefiting or indulging himself. At present it was filled and a little perplexed by three different sets of emotions—wonder, at the magnificence and value of the diamond necklace which Miss Driscoll had produced from the green bag; envy, that so much wealth should be at somebody else's, and not at his, Ninian Bexendale's disposal; speculation, as to how the property could be transferred from its present holder to himself. Ninian had a fair knowledge of human nature: he knew that when Miss Driscoll declared the value of the diamonds to be fifty thousand pounds, Miss Driscoll was somewhere near the truth. Fifty thousand pounds!—the mere reiteration of the words made him sick with longing and desire. He would have sold his soul for one-fiftieth the sum, if the devil would only have paid him in ready cash.

It may be as well to relate of this young gentleman that from his youth upward he had been given to nefarious practices. At an early age he abstracted stamps from the office drawer, and was cunning enough never to sell

them over the counter of the town post-office, keeping them, rather, until chance or fortune took him to some other place where he was not known. Later on, he appropriated postal orders and petty cash in the same way; at a still later period, being entrusted by his too-confiding father with the task of collecting sundry small and much over-due accounts, he had received the money and put it in his own pockets. Upon one occasion he had successfully forged his father's signature to a small cheque, and the forgery was so skilfully carried out that Mr. Bexendale had not been able to say that it was not his. Ninian, in short, was born to the predatory—where his instincts came from no one who knew his family could tell; but his earliest playmates could have told you that from childhood his sole interest in life seemed to lie in cheating, picking and stealing. He was one of that order of the human race whose instincts of theft are aroused by the sight of a sixpence that does not belong to them, and who could not be left alone in a dining-room where the desert had been laid out, without pocketing the peaches.

All the way between Castleford and Leeds, Ninian Bexendale's brains were steadily occupied with the problem—How to get hold of Miss Driscoll's diamonds? Long before he had made a noiseless exit from the cupboard he had recognized one fact as being what he called a dead certainty—the job could not be worked single-handed. It was a pity, but it couldn't be helped. He would much have liked to have had the swag entirely to and for himself; but he saw no more prospect of that than of carrying away the Monument on a hand cart. Big affairs like that, he knew, must be worked in couples, if not in gangs. So long as this could be worked by a couple Ninian felt

that he would be content—he would certainly have liked to have full value, but, if he could not get it, he would put up with half. But he wished no further finger in the pie—two hands were quite enough.

"So long as Dick and I can work it," he said to himself as the train wormed its way through the grime and gloom of Hunslet, into the smoke-sodden atmosphere of Leeds, "so long as Dick and I can work it—by ourselves—I shan't care. There'd be a fortune for each of us if the thing's properly worked out. But we mustn't have even a third partner in it—that's flat."

With these thoughts in his mind, Mr. Ninian Bexendale got out of the train, left the station and turned into Boar Lane, which sombre thoroughfare—it being then nearly six o'clock in the evening—was crowded with folk who were on their way home. He pushed his way through the crowds, taking no notice of anything, until he came to Briggate. Then he turned sharply round towards the bridge, and, within a hundred yards of it, stepped out of the street into a narrow alley and into a shop, from the door of which a barber's pole projected. He did not glance at the window as he entered—that being none of his business; if he had, his eyes would have fallen, for perhaps the thousandth time, on certain gilt letters, picked out on a chocolate background:

RICHARD CLAYE,

Hairdresser and Tobacconist.

Ninian passed through a little shop, at the counter of which a yellow-haired young lady presided over a somewhat meagre-looking stock of tobacco and pipes,

and cigarettes, with no more than a curt nod to its occupant, and pushed open the door of the haircutting room beyond. This was not much more pretentious than the tobacconist's shop outside—it was furnished with shabby plush lounges, running round three sides, a couple of marble tables, fitted with mirrors and adjuncts to the toilets, and a similar number of shaving chairs. The walls were adorned with advertisements of tobacco, pictures of famous racehorses and well-known jockeys, and with the play bills of the various theatres and music halls within the city. It was a plain, somewhat shabby little place, and had an air about it which suggested that it was not exactly all that it appeared to be.

Two persons were present in the room when Ninian Bexendale pushed open the swing door and walked in. One, a pale-faced man of thirty, had laid aside his barber's apron and was obviously preparing himself for departure by brushing a somewhat seedy black coat which was intended to supplement an equally seedy vest and trousers. The other, a rather handsome, full-habited man of forty or forty-five, with a clean shaven face, dark hair, curling at the temples, and a pair of quick, mobile eyes, stood leaning against the fire-place, cleaning and polishing his finger-nails. He looked up from his task and met Ninian Bexendale's inquiring eyes, which threw him a suggestion as they met his own.

"Well!" he said, "how are you?"

"How are you?" responded Ninian. "Knocking off for the day?"

"Just about," said the other, returning his nail scissors to his waistcoat pocket.

"I've a bit of time to spare," said Ninian carelessly.

"I thought perhaps you'd like to have a hundred at billiards?"

"No objection at all, my boy. I'll just go through the cash, lock up, and be with you in half-a-mo," said Mr. Claye, bustling cheerfully into the tobacconist's shop. "Take a seat—there's the *Evening Post*."

Ninian sat down on the faded velvet lounge, picked up the paper, and turned to the racing news. The pale-faced man put on his coat, picked up a small bag, said "Good-night, sir," in a subdued voice, and went his way through the swing door. A faint jingle of cash sounded in the shop and died away: then the yellow-haired young woman came out, put on her hat and jacket before one of the mirrors, patted her back hair, shook her skirts, and went away also: the hairdresser and tobacconist appeared again, shaking coins into his trousers' pocket.

"Seventeen shillings and a halfpenny," said he with a grin at Ninian. "A fine lucrative business that, my son, ain't it—sort of business that makes a man into a millionaire in time."

"It pays you, Dick, anyway," said Mr. Ninian Bexendale.

"Taking it altogether," remarked Mr. Claye, as he divested his outer self of a white linen overall suit, and revealed himself in a well cut suit of tweed, "it pays the girl, the assistant, and the taxes. I pay the rent."

"And you can well afford to do it," said Ninian. "I shouldn't grudge it."

"I never grudge anything that's spent in the way of business, my boy. But y'know, I don't think I can work this little game much longer. If the good people who

look after our morals get to know that most of the folk who come here for a ha-porth o' matches, or to pay for a shave which they don't get are really coming to put a bit on—it'll be shift your quarters elsewhere," observed Mr. Claye.

"There'll be some way out of the difficulty," said Ninian. "Come on—are you ready." Mr. Claye put on a bowler hat, picked up a silver-mounted umbrella, and, having ushered his friend out of the shop, locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"Same old place?" he said.

"Yes," answered Ninian. "But—no billiards. I want to have a quiet talk—I've got the best and biggest thing you ever heard of. Wait till we get into a corner."

Mr. Claye displayed neither surprise nor impatience —he hummed a cheerful tune as they turned into the street, and, crossing it, made for a tavern on the other side. It was not until he and his young friend were seated in a very quiet corner of a deserted billiard room, with glasses at their elbows and cigars in their mouths, that he referred to Ninian's last observation.

"Well?" he said. "Out with it, my son. What's it about?"

"It's about fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds," answered Ninian.

"That," remarked Mr. Claye, with a sip at his whisky and soda, "is a story which I should like to hear about. Regard me, my boy, as an attentive listener."

Ninian set forth the story in a fashion that would have done credit to the manufacturer of modern fiction. He wasted no words, he kept strictly to his narrative, he

never stopped to moralize, nor went out of his way to make comments, he told a plain tale in a plain fashion, and the result was that at the end of the story, Mr. Claye, who had preserved a praiseworthy silence all through, and had refrained from asking a single question, was in full possession of the accurate facts.

"Well put forward, my boy," said he. "You ought to ha' been one of the writing chaps. Now then, let's see how things stand. If the lady is so very anxious to get back to Ireland we may take it as being pretty well certain that she'll go there as soon as possible. The first thing, then, is to keep an eye on her, so that we shall know exactly when she starts.

"I can engage to do that," said Ninian.

"And don't forget what depends on being careful about it," said Mr. Claye. "If she got away without our knowledge the game's up. Well—the second thing is, that when she goes, we must go with her."

"Good Lord, how shall we manage that!" exclaimed Ninian. "She knows me well enough by sight."

"If you'll leave all that to me, my son, I'll so transform your physiognomy and your appearance that your own mother wouldn't know you," answered Mr. Claye. "I'll tell you what, my lad—we'll work the parson-on-a-holiday racket. You'll have to sacrifice that sweet little moustache and play the ingenuous and very young curate. I'll play a middle-aged vicar—I could make up much better as a Catholic priest, but there's always too many of that kidney going across, and I don't quite know the ropes to pull with them. Leave it to me about the clothes and collars and all the rest of it—I'll see you're all right, and I'll make myself all right."

"Oh, of course, I know," responded Ninian. "But as regards getting hold of 'em, Dick—what do you propose about that?"

"Have you ever travelled to Ireland, my son?" asked Mr. Claye.

"Twice," replied Ninian. "Once to the Leopardstown Races, and once to the Horse Show at Dublin."

"Then you'll know as well as I do," said Mr. Claye, "that there are two usual ways of proceeding to the distressful country from this quarter of the globe—one by the mail, which goes by way of Holyhead and Kingstown, the other by the express, which goes *via* Holyhead and North Wall. Now, it is a moral certainty that the lady must travel to Holyhead by way of Leeds—it's her quickest and most convenient route. What we must find out is—will she go by the mail or the express, and whether by the day mail or the night mail, the day express or the night express. Detail, my son, detail is the key to success in these little matters—always attend to details."

"Well?" said Ninian.

"Well, you must contrive to find out by which route, and at what time, and on what particular day the lady will travel," said Mr. Claye. "She'll probably call at your respected parent's office on the previous day and tell him everything—women always blab at moments like that—and you must take care to overhear all that she has to say. Then you must come straight to me, be transformed, and the two of us will meet her on the platform of the London and North-Western station and keep her in sight until we get the diamonds."

"And how do you propose to get them?" asked Ninian,

with emphasis. "Considering that she's going to attach them to her person with a steel chain?"

Mr. Claye spread out his hands: the gesture was careless and indifferent.

"During a train journey or a journey by boat—especially if the boat journey's made at night," he said, "a good many chances ought to occur of which I shan't fail to take advantage. Wait and see, my son. The first thing to do now is to come round to my place and let me run a tape over you so that your clerical clothes will be ready when you want 'em, and that, you know, may be soon."

In the privacy of Mr. Claye's rooms—conveniently situated in a quiet street leading out of Woodhouse Lane —Ninian's measurements were carefully taken and noted down, and then his friend gave him a careful looking over.

"You'll be a young curate on a holiday," he said. "You'll wear a Norfolk jacket suit of very dark gray, with a Roman collar, and a black straw hat, which you'll attach to your jacket, after the fashion of curates, by an elastic ribbon. You'll wear your watch in the breast pocket of your Norfolk jacket, and you'll show a bit of chain with a little gold cross at the end of it. As for myself, oh, well, leave that to me. It'll not be the first time I've played the parson. If you can learn a trick or two from an ingenuous, beardless young sky-pilot in your town, my son, learn it."

"You're a cute 'un, Dick," said young Mr. Bexendale. "You are, indeed."

"If I am, my son," responded Mr. Claye, "it's because I've got to be. And now let's go round and have a drink, and I'll play you that game of billiards that we've been

neglecting for an hour and a half. No more business to-night."

Three weeks later, Mr. Claye, closing his tobacconist establishment for the evening, had a wire put into his hands which he leisurely opened and read. It contained but five words.

"*Coming by next train. Bexendale.*"

Mr. Claye walked to the station and met the train. Ninian descended, took him aside, and whispered in his ear.

"It's all right," he said. "She comes on from Castleford early tomorrow morning, and leaves here by the 8.45 train for Dublin. By Holyhead and Kingstown. And she'll carry the stuff on her in the green bag—chained to her belt."

CHAPTER V

THE IRISH DAY MAIL

At half-past eight o'clock on the following morning two clergymen of highly respectable appearance got out of a four-wheeled cab at the entrance of the London and North-Western Railway station at Leeds, and engaged the services of a porter, who presently placed upon a truck the luggage which descended from the roof of the cab, and proved by its very aspect the gentility of its owners. It consisted of two portmanteaux of well-worn and yet undeniably smart appearance, two bundles of rugs, walking sticks, and umbrellas, and two golf bags, from the mouths of which protruded sticks, the leathers of which had evidently seen sufficient use to warrant the assertion that their proprietors had played on many greens. The younger clergyman, who was attired in a neat, well-fitting Norfolk suit of that eminently clerical stuff known to the trade and the general public as Oxford Mixture, was a pleasant-faced, mild, young curate sort of person, whose prevailing aspect was typical of a rather weak amiability; the elder was a jovial, kindly-looking middle-aged man, habited in a carefully but clerical lounge suit, who bore the unmistakable stamp of a parson off for a holiday. He it was who directed the porter to place the luggage in a second-class smoking compartment of the train, and to label the portmanteaux "*via* Kingstown"; he it was, too, who proceeded to the booking office and eyed the passengers assembled there with

keenly critical eyes. From amongst them he soon picked out a tall, well-built woman of apparently forty years of age, who, at the moment he approached, opened a long travelling cloak and revealed a green leather bag which hung at her waist on the left side. He saw her open the bag and produce from it a stout leather purse: he saw her close the bag and rebutton her travelling cloak; he was near enough to her at the ticket window to hear her book through to Dublin: and to notice that instead of restoring the purse to her bag, she retained it in her hand: and after that he took two tickets for himself and his companion and went to join the latter in the smoking compartment, which the younger clergyman had already entered, and at the door of which the porter waited, expectant of a tip.

When the train moved out of the station the two clergymen, who were fortunate enough to have the compartment all to themselves, looked at each other and laughed.

"All right, so far, my son," said the elder. "She's in the next compartment but one, green bag and all."

"How do you like her looks?" said the younger, lighting a cigarette. "She's a bit on the muscular side, isn't she?"

"A fine-looking woman, and a lady-like woman," replied the other. "Carries her age well. Sort of woman, I fancy, who could hold her own in a scrap."

"I believe you, my boy," said young Mr. Bexendale. "I say, Dick, what if it should come to anything like a scrap?"

"My son," said Mr. Claye, as he lighted a cigar of very good brand, "never lay your hands on a woman save in the way of love—or unless you're really obliged

to do so from sheer necessity. I don't suppose there'll be the least necessity in this case, but I must say I hadn't quite bargained for that damned travelling cloak. I had made a little plan that I thought would meet the exigencies of the case, but I'm afraid the travelling cloak stops it. I must say she's a far-seeing sort of woman. I twigged how she'd secured the green bag to her waist—rather a pretty waist, too, my boy, if a bit substantial."

"How?" asked the young Mr. Bexendale with much apparent interest.

"Why, by a long, slender steel chain—I guess she's had it specially manufactured for the occasion—which goes two or three times round her waist, and is then covered by a smart belt," said Mr. Claye. "The bag depends from the chain by two smaller chains of three links each. If she weren't wearing the travelling coat—damn whoever it was that invented 'em!—this is the article that would do the trick."

He dived into his breast pocket and produced a shining instrument which bore some faint resemblance to a pair of scissors. Young Mr. Bexendale stared at this with great admiration, and finally taking it into his hands touched it here and there as gently as if it had been a baby.

"That's a pretty thing," he said, "some grip about it, too."

"It was made by the right man, my boy," answered Mr. Claye, repocketing the implement, "and I only wish that I may be able to tell him that it was of the highest use."

"What's your notion, Dick?" asked young Mr. Bexendale.

Mr. Claye puffed at his cigar for a few minutes before he replied.

"Well, my boy, it was just this," he said. "If you'd crossed to the Emerald Isle as often as I have you'd know that there are one or two chances for nice pickings for men who know their work. For example, this train of ours runs to Manchester Exchange station—there we change into another which carries us to Chester—at Chester we join the Irish day mail from Euston to Holyhead. When we get to Holyhead they run us down to the pier, where one of the mail steamers is waiting us. They give you precious little time to board her, because it is a pleasant fiction with them that the passengers are nothing and mails everything. The consequence is that, what with the ingrained notion of haste, the wish of some of the passengers to secure berths, and of others to get down to the saloon to lunch, everybody leaves the train for the steamer in a rush, and you go over the gangway as sheep go through a gap in the fence, all squeezing together, as tight as you like. Now it stands to common sense that there's a fine chance for investigating a pocket, relieving a poor, over-weighted fellow-traveller of a small bag, or his watch, or doing some similar deed of kindness to yourself and the rest of the world—see?"

Young Mr. Bexendale said that he saw, and lighted another cigarette with the remark that Mr. Richard Claye was damned clever.

"Well then," continued Mr. Claye, "there's Kingstown—beautiful Kingstown, which, my son, has, in my humble opinion, the finest bay in Europe, a damned sight finer, again in my humble opinion, than the Bay of Naples—well, Kingstown pier, on the arrival of the mail steamer,

is, or ought to be, has been, and will be again, what vulgar people call a fair treat. What happens? Everybody is so jolly glad to get off the boat, and to terra firma that the crowding and crushing process begins all over again —they crush on the deck nearest to the landing stage, they crush up the gangway, they crush on the pier, they run about wildly alongside the train that takes you to Westland Row, and they lose their heads generally—especially the women.

"Lord!—I remember a lovely little incident that me and Billy Rider—doing a stretch of ten years poor Billy is at present—had on Kingstown pier six years ago. We were going over to the Curragh, and, of course, we were on the look-out for whatever manna might fall upon our wilderness. When the mail arrived we were first up the gangway. Very soon up comes a lady's maid all a fluster, with her mistress behind her, just as much excited. Lady's maid goes one way—lady another—lady's maid whips open a first-class carriage door, pops what was obviously a jewel-case on the seat and turns to her mistress. Mistress not being there, maid runs shrieking up platform after her. Billy Rider nips into carriage, snatches jewel-case, and disappears through the opposite door. Pooh—it was like picking mushrooms on an August morning!" concluded Mr. Claye, producing a flask, "Have a nip, my boy."

Mr. Bexendale drank Mr. Claye's good health, and again expressed his admiration of that gentleman.

"So you see," continued Mr. Claye, when he, too, had drank and had lighted a second very excellent cigar, "there are things to be done on an ordinary rail-and-boat journey like this. I thought we might have got that

green bag in the crush, but the travelling coat is a bit of a nuisance—however, we'll see, my son, we'll see, and as there's no one to criticize us, let's have a harmless hand at nap."

Occupying themselves with harmless hands at nap, occasional drinks from their flasks, and with cigars and cigarettes, Mr. Claye and his youthful companion progressed quite satisfactorily through Manchester and Chester, where they changed into the Irish mail, having first taken good care to ascertain that their quarry was calmly progressing in the same direction. Miss Driscoll, in fact, was shadowed by these two exactly as a suspected person is shadowed by detectives who wait the moment at which to arrest him. They were never more than a few yards from her on the platforms at Manchester and Chester: they followed her into the second-class saloon which she entered at the last-named station: they kept her under observation the whole way. During the run from Chester to Holyhead the conduct of Mr. Claye and his partner was irreproachable. As they formed a part of a numerous company which filled the saloon, they eschewed the cards, the flask, the cigars, and the cigarette, and comported themselves after the fashion of clergymen and gentlemen. Mr. Claye, who was a man of many parts and of diverse interests, read the *Church Times* when he was not discussing the coast scenery with his friend. Mr. Bexendale, in periods of silence, solaced himself with the *Daily Telegraph*. Miss Driscoll, who was experiencing those novelties and delights of travel which appeal so strongly to folk who have not had a holiday for some years—and she had taken none since setting up in business—found much pleasure in studying the faces of her

fellow-passengers, and in framing conclusions about them. She looked at the two clergymen who occupied seats on the other side of the saloon, and thought that they were a very pleasant couple—father and son, or uncle and nephew, by the confidential air which rested on and around them. The young man's face, she thought, was a little weak and undecided, but he had a pleasant smile and manner, and looked very nice in his Norfolk suit and black straw hat. As for the elder clergyman, she considered him a fine figure of a man with a clever face, and she formed the opinion from the fact that he wore a Roman collar, was clean shaven, and read the *Church Times,* that he was a distinguished High Churchman.

The Irish mail was heavy and full that day, and when its two engines pulled it alongside the steamer at Holyhead, just as the clocks were striking two, there was the usual stampede of passengers across the platform for the gangway. Miss Driscoll found herself descending the gangway in the company of the two clergymen, who were wedged in with her amongst a crowd of struggling passengers. The younger, who was slightly in advance of her, made some attempt to shield her from the crush: the elder, who was at her side, made a polite observation as to the inconvenience occasioned by so much crowding. Miss Driscoll thought they were both very nice men, and of very good manners.

Once on board the steamer the two clergymen, after seeing their luggage deposited in empty berths, repaired to the saloon, and, finding a quiet corner, ordered lunch to be served immediately. As most of the passengers had lunched on the train, there were very few lunching on the boat: the saloon was consequently almost deserted,

and Mr. Claye and Mr. Bexendale were free to converse. Their conversation, carried on in a low tone, was by no means of a clerical nature.

"If it hadn't been for that damned travelling coat," said Mr. Claye, "I should have had a go for it then. And yet I don't know—it would have been awkward if she'd felt anything and turned round and found me with the thing in my hands. Of course, I flatter myself that I'm a bit too expert for that, but you never know when accidents will happen,—and it's a bit difficult to work a thing like that when you're climbing a gangway."

"And in broad daylight, too," said Mr. Bexendale.

"Ah, yes, the daylight's the very devil," responded Mr. Claye, sipping the whisky and soda which he from his experience of the world knew to be quite a clergyman-like beverage. "It would have been far better if she had travelled by the night mail—we should have had a much better chance in the darkness."

"What's going to be done?" asked Mr. Bexendale.

"Well, we'll see what chance offers at Kingstown," replied Mr. Claye, devoting himself to his plate. "Now that we're on the hunt we are not going to be set back by a few paltry obstacles, my boy. If we can't do anything else we'll have a try for the shiners at the hotel."

"How do we know what hotel she'll go to?" inquired Mr. Bexendale. "She mayn't go to any hotel at all. I've been looking at the railway guide, and I see she can go right through to Limerick tonight, if she likes."

"But she won't, my son," said Mr. Claye with great confidence. "She'll stop in Dublin for the week-end to have a look round. You'll see. And now come on deck and have a cigar and smell the briny, and let's see where

our quarry is. And lift up your heart—we shall handle the swag yet."

It was at this juncture that fortune again threw Miss Driscoll into the hands of the conspirators.

CHAPTER VI

MISS DRISCOLL'S FATAL MISTAKE

WHEN Mr. Claye and his companion went on deck they found the *Linster* steaming noisily away westward over as smooth a sea as the most squeamish seagoer could desire, with the cliffs of Holyhead already receding in the distance, and the Skerries to the northward lifting humped and craggy backs out of what seemed to be the illimitable ocean. There were a great many people on deck, and fore and aft there was much bustle going on, consequent upon the sorting of baggage at one end of the boat and of the mail bags at the other. Mr. Claye and Mr. Bexendale, strolling towards the part where the foreman luggage porter was imperturbably giving directions of his satellites, became aware of the presence of Miss Driscoll, who was apparently following the aforesaid foreman about, and either expostulating with him or endeavouring to extract some information from him. Mr. Claye suddenly saw an opportunity. With a muttered "Stay where you are," to his companion, he threw away his cigar, stepped up to Miss Driscoll and raised his soft clerical hat with great politeness.

"I fear you are in some difficulty, madam?" he said in his most cultured accents. "If so, pray command me. I am an old and experienced traveller."

Miss Driscoll turned to him with a look of gratitude. "I'm much obliged to you, sir, I'm sure," she said. "The

difficulty is that I have lost my trunks, or these people have lost them for me, and I can't get any information out of them."

The foreman luggage porter looked at Miss Driscoll and then at Mr. Claye with a glance that was at once deprecatory and re-assuring.

"It'll be all right, ma'am, all right," he said. "It'll have been——"

"But it's not all right," said Miss Driscoll, interrupting him with some vehemence of manner. "How can it be all right when I don't know where my trunks are?"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Claye. "If I might be informed of the facts?"

"Well, the facts, sir, are simple enough," answered Miss Driscoll. "I have two large trunks which were labelled at Leeds for Dublin. I myself saw them put into the van at Leeds; I saw them at Manchester; I saw them at Chester. As soon as I got on board at Holyhead I came to the baggage gangway to look for them. They did not come, and before I could go on shore again the boat was off. The porter says he has looked all over for them, and they are certainly not on board. What I want to know is—where are they?"

Mr. Claye, perceiving that the foreman porter was waiting, with a wearily patient face, to have his say in the matter, turned to him.

"It's all right, sir," said the foreman. "The lady should have had the trunk labelled *via* Kingstown, instead of merely Dublin. They've been put off at Holyhead station, instead of being brought down to Holyhead pier, and they'll come on by the North Wall boat at five o'clock.

You'll find them at North Wall, ma'am, about nine o'clock this evening."

Mr. Claye comprehended, saw his chance, and thanked his lucky stars.

"Ah, yes, yes, that's quite right," he said. "Thank you, my man. You see, madam," he continued, turning to Miss Driscoll, "it is just as he says. The train stops at Holyhead station and puts off any passengers and whatever baggage may be going over by the North Wall route. As your trunks were labelled Dublin, and not Kingstown, they were put off there, and they will be sent forward by the evening boat to North Wall, where you will find them quite safe, on the barrier in the station, about nine o'clock. A very, ve-ry simple matter," concluded Mr. Claye. "It once happened to my baggage."

"But that will mean that I shall have to stay in Dublin all night," said Miss Driscoll. "I meant to catch the six twenty-five for Limerick at Kingsbridge this evening."

"I fear," said Mr. Claye, "that that cannot be done, unless, indeed, you leave your trunks to take care of themselves."

"I shall not do that, certainly," said Miss Driscoll, with much decision, "so I shall have to stay all night in Dublin whether I wish it or not."

"If I might advise," said Mr. Claye, toying with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses and assuming an oracular air, "I should suggest that your best plan, madam, would be to drive round to North Wall, put up at the London and North Western Hotel—an admirable and well-conducted house—for the night, and catch the eight o'clock train

in the morning from the adjacent station for Kingsbridge, where you would have an hour for breakfast before joining the 9.45 of the Great Southern and Western for Limerick. That," concluded Mr. Claye, "is what my young friend and colleague and myself are doing—we prefer that hotel to those in the city because of its quietude and the facility afforded by being able to walk out of one's hotel into one's train as it were. We go on tomorrow morning to Limerick, on our way to Lehinch, where we shall play golf."

Miss Driscoll thought all this very good advice, and said so, and thanked Mr. Claye heartily for taking so much trouble about her affairs. He responded that it had been a pleasure to serve her, bowed politely, and withdrew to rejoin Mr. Bexendale, whom he presently conducted to a quiet corner of the top deck and made acquainted with all that had passed.

"It's a perfect God-send," he said, as he lighted a fresh cigar. "We'll manage it at the hotel tonight as sure as eggs are eggs. Never mind how, just now, my son, it's maturing in my mind. What a lovely afternoon!" he exclaimed, baring his head to the breeze. "I wonder when we might, as respectable parsons, have another whisky and soda? I should think even a parson is allowed a bit of latitude on a holiday."

"I should think so, too," said Mr. Bexendale, "Let's go below."

Mr. Claye, being an essentially wise man, did not press himself upon Miss Driscoll again. He exchanged a friendly and very polite bow with her on leaving the boat, and again at Westland Row, where he and his companion and Miss Driscoll were all quickly swallowed in

a wildly confused mass of passengers, porters, and outside cars. Mr. Claye knew quite well that two things were absolutely certain—the first, that Miss Driscoll would take good care of her green bag; the second, that she would present herself at North Wall to claim her trunks. He also felt almost as certain that she would stop the night at the hotel he had recommended to her.

In these surmises Mr. Claye proved to be quite correct. The car which conveyed him and Mr. Bexendale from Westland Row to North Wall followed another car wherein sat Miss Driscoll. Miss Driscoll had just booked her room at the hotel when Mr. Claye and Mr. Bexendale arrived there—they saw her name in the register against the number 19. Presently their own names appeared in the register against the numbers 20 and 21—or, rather, one should say, the names by which they just then cared to be designated and the initials of which appeared on their portmanteaux. The Rev. Herbert Meredith, M.A.; the Rev. Frank Somerville, B.A. Nothing could have been more highly respectable.

Mr. Claye and Mr. Bexendale, after performing their ablutions and donning clean clerical collars in the privacy of their respective rooms, met again in the coffee room and proceeded to dine on the best which the house afforded. While they were dining, Miss Driscoll entered, and took a seat at an adjacent table, and favoured the senior clergyman with a bow and a smile, to which he gravely responded. Both men noticed, without seeming to do so, that Miss Driscoll, although she had changed her tailor-made coat and skirt in which she had travelled for a gown more suitable for evening wear, still wore the green leather bag at her waist, and that the steel chain

which they knew to hold it there was covered with a silk girdle. Mr. Claye was greatly pleased when he observed this, and he confided the reason to Mr. Bexendale when, dinner being over, they repaired to a quiet corner of the smoking-room for coffee and cigars.

"The only thing I've been afraid of since we left the boat," he said, "was that when she got here she'd entrust the bag to the management and have it locked up in the hotel safe. My son, there ought to be a law against that sort of thing—Lord, when I think of the beautiful hauls that I might have had if only it hadn't been for that damned placard which they stick up in hotel bedrooms, warning guests against retaining valuables in their own hands. Now, she's going to keep that bag in her room all night."

"How do you know?" asked Mr. Bexendale. "She may hand it in at the office, after all."

"She won't," said Mr. Claye, with decision. "She'll stick to it. If she'd meant to have it locked up in the safe she'd hand it in to the office before she went to dinner. I'll lay you a hundred to one that she sleeps with it round her night-dress," concluded Mr. Claye, nodding his head emphatically.

"And how are you going to get it?" asked Mr. Bexendale. "I confess I don't quite see the game yet."

"We're going to get it, that's certain," remarked Mr. Claye. "Now, you listen to me—you've got your little part to play in this, my son, and you'll have to be as careful as ever you can."

"I'm wideawake enough," responded Mr. Bexendale. "You can trust me, Dick."

"Sh!—no names, or else I shan't trust you," said the

mentor. "Now listen—the North Wall boat from Holyhead gets into the river here about nine o'clock, and as it's fair weather tonight it will be about punctual. Soon after the boat arrives they begin unloading the passenger luggage. They bring it up into the station, outside the hotel here, and they pile it up on a sort of barrier, so that each passenger may claim his or her own. Sometimes the process is soon over; sometimes it takes a little time. Now listen—at about nine o'clock you will go down into the station. You will light a cigar; you will stroll about, playing the part of an innocent young curate who finds great interest in watching the people who come off the steamer, and who crowd about the barrier. You will keep a sharp look-out for the lady—when you catch sight of her, either as she comes from the hotel, or if she is already in the station before you, you will go up to her and blushingly and nervously ask if you can assist her to find the missing trunks, of which your vicar has told you. You will purposely delay finding them as long as possible, which you can easily accomplish by rushing up and down the barrier, as a damned fool of a youthful curate would, and you'll keep her there all you can. Then, when they're found, you'll get a porter to carry them into the hotel, and you yourself will repair to the smoking-room and wait for me. Got it all perfect?"

"Every word," answered Mr. Bexendale. "I'll do it —like an actor."

"Then as we've got an hour to spare yet," said Mr. Claye, "we'll just do a stroll along the dock side."

While these worthies were doing the stroll which Mr. Claye had suggested, Miss Driscoll, sitting in solitude in the drawing-room of the hotel, was endeavouring to make

up her mind about a question which perplexed her greatly. She knew that she had fifty thousand pounds' worth of property on her person, and that she was amongst strangers in a strange hotel, and that, by all the rules of common sense and common prudence, she ought to deposit the valuables in the custody of the manager. But, like most women, she had a distinct objection to letting her valuables pass out of her own custody, and ever since she had arrived at the hotel and had seen her room, she had been finding reasons why she should keep the diamonds about her person. First of all, she said to herself, it was not very likely that thieves would select that particular hotel, and that particular night whereat and whereon to commit depredations: secondly, her room was fitted with what appeared to be a good lock and a good bolt. But third, and chiefly, nobody in the world—saving her solicitor, who was far away by that time, and quite beyond suspicion—knew that she had the diamonds upon her person, and therefore no one would think of trying to steal what they did not know to exist. She determined to retain the green bag in her own possession.

At five minutes to nine o'clock Miss Driscoll went up to her room, put on the long travelling cloak to which Mr. Claye had taken such an antipathy, and went out to the station to find the missing trunks. As the sound of her footsteps died away slowly down the thickly carpeted corridor, Mr. Claye's head protruded from the door of the next room—before Miss Driscoll's skirts had swished down the first flight of stairs Mr. Claye was at her door. He touched the handle—the door yielded easily—Mr. Claye stepped inside.

"I knew she'd leave it open," he said, half chuckling, as he closed the door and turned on the electric light. "Now then for it."

Mr. Claye's proceedings were very simple. He examined the lock and key and sniffed at both. He looked rather more narrowly at the bolt. Then he took from his waistcoat pocket a screw-driver with a very fine point, and went to work on the screws which held the bolt plate to the door. Within quite a few minutes every screw had been loosened to such an extent that a gentle, continuous push from outside would have forced them out and rendered the bolt useless. Yet looked at in a casual fashion the bolt and its fittings appeared to be intact.

Mr. Claye put the pretty screw-driver in his pocket again and turned to the bed. The coverlet and sheets were turned down: upon the pillow was opened out Miss Driscoll's night-gown. Mr. Claye regarded the latter article of female attire very attentively before he touched it—he wished to impress its exact folds upon his mind and eye. At last he unfolded it with deft fingers, and stretched out the two sleeves right and left.

She may sleep on the right side, she may sleep on the left," he said. "I'll make sure in any case."

He produced a small phial from an inner pocket of his waistcoat and carefully taking out the cork sprinkled a few drops of its contents on each sleeve of the night-gown, just above the elbow. He sprinkled a few more on the lace work at the breast; a few more still on each of the pillows, and along the edge of the sheet where the sleeper's face might be supposed to come in contact with it.

"A little knowledge of science," mused Mr. Claye, as he recorked the phial and returned it to his pocket, "is a very valuable thing."

Then he refolded the night-gown in its original folds, laid it in the exact spot where he had found it, and appeared satisfied with his handiwork. He bent down and sniffed slightly at pillows, sheet, and night-gown—there was nothing perceivable in the way of odour nor was there any stain on the linen. No one could have said that the bed had been tampered with.

Mr. Claye gave a final look round him, opened the door gently, and stepped quietly back to his own room. Having arrived there he took a nip from his pocket-flask and wiped his forehead.

"It's as safe as houses," he said.

He turned out his light, and standing at the slightly open door of his room listened for the sound of footsteps on the stairs at the end of the corridor. Five minutes—ten minutes, a quarter of an hour passed away—then he heard light footsteps and heavy ones—quite a number of footsteps. Miss Driscoll was coming to her room, attended by a chambermaid and by a couple of porters carrying the missing trunks.

Mr. Claye waited until the porters had been tipped and had gone away: he waited until the chambermaid had gone away with a "good-night, madam": he waited until he heard Miss Driscoll's key turn in the lock and Miss Driscoll's bolt slip into its socket. Then he uttered a sigh of great satisfaction, and went softly downstairs and found Mr. Bexendale studying the *Graphic* in the smoking-room.

"Well?" asked that inquisitive young gentleman. "Is

it all right?—I reckon I played my part to perfection."

"It is all right," replied Mr. Claye. "All right, my son. All that you have to do is to retire to your virtuous couch at precisely eleven o'clock and to sleep the sleep of the good until seven tomorrow morning. You can leave all the rest to me—it's all over but the shouting, and we win hands down."

In her rooms upstairs Miss Driscoll, who was very tired and already in bed, felt herself impelled to sleep in singularly soft and soothing fashion. She slept as a child sleeps, until the sun was high in the heavens and a loud knocking at her door conspired with the strong light to wake her. She started up then with a wild consciousness that something had happened. She stared about her at the strange room, at the trunks, at her clothes, and suddenly remembered everything, and she clutched violently at the things which she had fastened round her waist ere she got into bed the night before. There was nothing but her unfettered draperies there—the steel chain and the green bag and the diamonds were gone!

EPISODE THE FOURTH

HANRAHAN'S SALOON

CHAPTER I

THE SIGNET RING

After having lived forty years in the world and seen a good deal of life and of human nature, Miss Driscoll was not the woman to be surprised at anything, nor was she the sort of person who screams when some great shock or crisis suddenly alters the placidly flowing course of life's stream. So when she discovered that the unexpected had happened, and that steel chain, the green bag, and the precious diamonds had disappeared, she neither ran to the bell, tore her hair, nor uttered piercing screams —she just sat up in her bed and faced the situation with the calmness and fortitude of common sense.

Miss Driscoll knew quite well that she had been robbed. She also knew, quite as well, that the robbery had been carried out in a highly ingenious manner, and that it was probably the work of a gang. But how should any gang know of the existence of the diamonds or of her possession of them? No one in this world knew that she had them save Mr. Bexendale. And Miss Driscoll knew, as one knows a thing of absolute knowledge, that Mr. Bexendale was a man of strict probity. It was no use making any connection between him and the disappearance of the diamonds: the villains who had appropriated them must be looked for elsewhere. She began to think of other possible contingencies; the only notion that seemed at all sensible was that other folk than the late Mr. Finney had been connected with the mys-

tery of the diamonds, had not dared at the time of his sudden demise to come forward and claim them, but knowing that they must have fallen into Miss Driscoll's hands, had followed her until they found a fitting opportunity of laying hands upon them. That was the only theory by which Miss Driscoll could account for her loss. She must have been under observation for some time, she said to herself, as she sat there in bed staring blankly at the blank wall. The thieves must have followed her all the way from Castleford to Dublin; have been near her in the steamer; she might even have spoken to them: it was certain, at any rate, that they had been in the hotel with her last night, and might still be there. She knew that when she retired on the previous night, she had locked the steel chain round the waist of her nightdress and that it was now gone with all that it guarded.

How had it gone? What means had the thief or thieves used? Miss Driscoll was puzzled beyond measure when she put these questions to herself. She suspected that she had been drugged, and a slight feeling of cloudiness in the head strengthened her in her suspicion. But how and when? She thought over her dinner of the previous evening—it had been served to her in the coffee-room by a waitress who did not look like being in conspiracy with anybody about anything. She glanced at the water-bottle on her wash-stand—that might have been drugged, but she remembered that she had not touched it. If she had been drugged, the drugging had been carried out as skilfully as the robbery.

And how had the robbery been carried out?—how had the thief gained access to her room and stolen the dia-

monds from her very person? Miss Driscoll left her bed and went over to the door. She examined the lock—the key was turned. She examined the bolt—the bolt was shot home in the socket. She examined the bolt-plate—it was as tightly fastened to the door as screws could fasten it. She went over to the window—the lower sash, in accordance with her invariable custom, had been raised by her own hands when she went to bed, and so far as she could judge, it had not been touched. The window was some height from the ground—outside it was a very narrow ledge on which it was apparently impossible for a man to stand. It seemed to be unbelievable that anybody could have entered the room by the window. As for the door, there it was as she had left it the night before—intact. How the room had been entered was a mystery. That it had been entered was absolutely certain.

Miss Driscoll moved over to the dressing-table, where she had left her watch and several rings, together with her purse, which contained about fifty pounds in notes and gold. Watch, rings and purse all lay where she had left them,—it was plain that the thief cared little for small things, so long as he secured the great prize.

As her eyes strayed mechanically from one thing to another, Miss Driscoll suddenly perceived that the hands of the watch indicated the hour of nine. She then remembered that she had instructed the chambermaid to call her at seven o'clock. How was it that her order had not been obeyed? She had meant to catch the eight o'clock train—that was now out of the question. She crossed the room and put her finger on the button of the electric bell: as she did so a knock sounded on the door,

followed by a second and a third—each louder than the other.

Miss Driscoll opened the door. A chambermaid, a little uneasy of manner, entered the room bearing a can of hot water, and a pair of boots.

"I thought," said Miss Driscoll, "that I asked you to call me at seven o'clock?"

"I did, ma'am," answered the girl. "I knocked at seven o'clock and again at eight, loudly, and couldn't get any answer from you."

"I must have slept too soundly," observed Miss Driscoll. "If the manageress is disengaged," she said, as the chambermaid was leaving the room, "I wish you would ask her to come to my room for a few minutes."

"Yes, ma'am," answered the girl. She glanced rather timidly at Miss Driscoll. "I hope you have no complaint to make, ma'am?" she said.

"No, no!" said Miss Driscoll. "I merely wish to see the manageress."

When the manageress arrived Miss Driscoll had arrayed herself in her dressing-gown and slippers. She pointed the manageress to a chair, seated herself on the edge of the bed, and went straight to business.

"I wished to speak to you on a matter of importance," said Miss Driscoll. "I have been robbed."

"Robbed, madam." The manageress's eyes went instinctively to the watch, rings, and purse on the table, and to the two large trunks which still remained locked and strapped. "I hope the loss is not a great one?" she said.

"I have been robbed of fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds," said Miss Driscoll.

"Fifty—thousand—pounds'—worth—of—diamonds! Are you really serious, madam?" asked the manageress.

"I was never so serious in my life, as you may guess," replied Miss Driscoll. "Who wouldn't be?"

"But here?—in your room?—during the night?" The manageress's fingers twisted and untwisted in her anxiety and horror of the crime. "How could it be?"

"I wish I knew," said Miss Driscoll. "But it was here in this room, between ten o'clock last night, when I went to sleep, and half past eight this morning when I woke. How the thing was managed I can't think. I locked and bolted the door last night—both key and bolt were all right this morning. I don't see how anybody could get in by the window unless a scaling ladder was used, and I don't suppose anyone could come down the chimney or go away by it. But there's the fact—I've been robbed, and in this room, and during the night."

"Of fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds!" said the manageress. "I can't believe—I mean I can't understand it, madam."

"As to believing," said Miss Driscoll, "that's an easy matter. I mean it's an easy matter to prove that I was in possession of the diamonds when I came into this room last night. Listen—I took the diamonds over from the manager of Messrs. Leatham, Tew and Co.'s bank at Castleford, in Yorkshire, very early yesterday morning, and my solicitor, Mr. Bexendale, of the same town, saw me deposit them in a green leather bag which I secured about my waist by a fine steel chain of exceptional strength. I arrived here, as you know, last night, and when I retired I locked the steel chain round the waist

of my night-dress, so that I might feel quite assured of the safety of my property. When I woke this morning, chain, bag and diamonds were gone."

"You mean, madam, that they had—had been removed—from your very person while you slept?"

The manageress was horrified.

"Oh, indeed, I do!" said Miss Driscoll. "That's just what they were. There's no doubt I was drugged last night, but I can't think how. I never spoke to any one after entering the hotel; I did not sit near anyone who could have interfered with the single glass of claret I took at dinner. The thing's a mystery!"

"What do you propose to do, madam?" asked the manageress. "You are sure the diamonds are not in the room? You might, perhaps, have walked in your sleep, and, being anxious about them, have put them into one of your trunks?"

"That," said Miss Driscoll, "is one of the reasons why I sent for you. I want you, if you've time, to make a thorough examination of the room with me."

The manageress had time, or made it, and the two women set to work on the trunks, as suggested by Miss Driscoll. But there was no trace of the diamonds.

"What of the people who were staying in the house last night?" asked Miss Driscoll, when the search was over. "Have you any knowledge of any of them?"

"It so happens, madam," said the manageress, who naturally, was jealous of the honour of the hotel, "that I have some knowledge of all the persons who stayed in the house last night, with the exception of yourself and the two clergymen who occupy the two next rooms in this corridor. We had remarkably few guests last night,

and all of them, as I say, were known to me—with the exceptions I have named."

The manageress's tone had grown somewhat distant, and not a little icy in quality, and she surveyed Miss Driscoll with speculative eyes. During the search for the diamonds she had been thinking, in a quick, business-like fashion, and, the more she thought, the more she realized the improbability of Miss Driscoll's story. She had never heard of such a thing as a lady travelling with fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds fastened about her waist by a steel chain, nor of such an extraordinary thing as a lady securing such wealth about her waist while she slept. Nor could she understand how, if the diamonds had really been attached in this fashion to Miss Driscoll's by no means unsubstantial figure, they could possibly have been removed therefrom, during the silent watches of the night, without Miss Driscoll being aware of it. And then, the circumstances of the locked and bolted door—how could any one have effected an entrance into Miss Driscoll's room, when Miss Driscoll, herself, acknowledged that the door, when she woke in the morning, was in exactly the same state as when she went to bed at night? The manageress began to suspect that Miss Driscoll was the victim of an hallucination.

"As I said before, madam," she repeated, "I am acquainted with all the persons who stayed in the house last night, with the exception of yourself, and the two clergymen."

Miss Driscoll, who had been staring at the manageress very fixedly, and in a somewhat abstracted fashion for the past two minutes, opened her lips suddenly.

"Ah," she said, "the clergymen!"

The manageress now stared at Miss Driscoll harder than ever.

"Yes, madam," she said. "You were about to say——"

"Was I?" answered Miss Driscoll. "Then I wasn't about to say anything! I simply remarked, 'The clergymen!' I say again, 'The clergymen!' Pray, are the clergymen still in the hotel?"

The manageress began to perceive that Miss Driscoll was a person of a certain strength of will and of a decided character. Strange as the whole affair was, it was evident, from Miss Driscoll's manner, that there was more in it than the manageress could yet guess at, or understand.

"The elder clergyman," she replied, "breakfasted at an early hour this morning, madam, and took a car soon after seven o'clock for Kingsbridge. He left word at the office that his nephew, the younger clergyman, was somewhat indisposed, and was not to be disturbed until ten o'clock."

"Ah," said Miss Driscoll, "did he?"

Miss Driscoll uttered these apparently insignificant words in such a significant tone that the manageress felt alarmed.

"You don't think, madam——" she began.

"I think," replied Miss Driscoll, "that I'll dress. I'm much obliged to you for coming to my room. Have the goodness to send me a cup of tea, and don't say anything about what has happened—I'll speak to you about it again when I come downstairs."

The manageress bowed and went away, feeling very uncomfortable and not a little alarmed. Meeting the chambermaid in the corridor outside, she bade her call

the young clergyman at once, and to tell him, at the same time, that his friend had left by the eight o'clock train. And having given this order she went into the room which the elder clergyman had vacated and gave it a close inspection. The inspection revealed nothing—the room was quite in order, so far as she could see. But, giving it a second careful examination, she was aware of a scrap of paper which had fluttered from a dressing-table to the floor. She picked it up, and saw that it was scribbled over with names and figures. She did not understand what they meant, but she put the paper in her pocket and went downstairs to the office, still highly mystified, and a good deal upset.

Mr. Ninian Bexendale, sleeping like a top in his room, became conscious, after a considerable amount of mental effort, that someone was knocking loudly at his door. He got up, at last, feeling very heavy and dazed, and admitted the chambermaid.

"It's ten o'clock, if you please, sir, and your friend left word that you were not to be called till then, and I was to say he had gone on to Kingsbridge," said the chambermaid.

"What the—oh, yes, all right, all right!" said Mr. Bexendale. He pulled himself together when the woman had gone, and tried to think what this meant. There was something queer about it. After five minutes' hard thinking, he concluded that Claye meant him to take a hint that they must foregather at Kingsbridge later in the morning, and he dressed and went downstairs.

Mr. Ninian Bexendale was a little ill at ease as he made his entrance, and, forgetting that he was now clean-shaven, he raised his right hand to caress a mous-

tache which was no longer there. He wore a signet-ring on the little finger of that hand, and Miss Driscoll, who had purposely taken a seat exactly opposite the door, saw it, and felt a sudden illumination. Surprised out of herself, she uttered four words:—

"My God!—Ninian Bexendale!"

CHAPTER II

MISS DRISCOLL'S WAY

Mr. Ninian Bexendale on hearing his name so glibly pronounced by Miss Driscoll felt his spine turn to marrow. He had been considerably upset by the events of the morning, and was not feeling at all well. He had drunk a great many more whiskies-and-sodas than were really good for him on the previous day, and he had a curious heavy dull feeling all over the top of his head which made him wonder if by any chance he had been poisoned. He could not account for the fact that he had slept until ten o'clock; as a rule he was a light sleeper and got up rather early, but on this particular morning he had slumbered drunkenly, and had felt no desire to get up at all. Then he was disturbed by the defection of his friend, Mr. Claye—as yet he could scarcely comprehend this, but it upset and annoyed him, and more than that, it occasioned him what he very much disliked at that moment—a racking and exercising of his brains which was inconvenient. Why on earth had Claye cleared out like that, and left him alone, in a dangerous place? What did it all mean. Was there something up? Had the plot failed, fizzled out? All these questions ran through young Mr. Bexendale's brain as he dressed himself in his curate's clothes and put on his clerical collar, and he found it difficult to answer them. The numerous spirituous drinks of the day before had made his brain weak, and

he was more inclined to weep than to reason. There was no source of comfort anywhere, save in the thought that Claye had really secured the diamonds and had judged it safest to get away with them early in the morning. Anyhow, all that he could do was to follow Claye's instructions and drive to Kingsbridge.

Mr. Ninian Bexendale was conscious of a bad weakness of the stomach when he had completed his toilet. He sat down on the edge of his bed and groaned.

"I wish I could have a brandy-and-soda!" he remarked to the unsympathetic walls of his bedroom. "But, damn it, it would look so, if a curate had a brandy-and-soda at this time in the morning—and especially before breakfast. Damn!"

Then a brilliant notion entered the mind of this unhappy young man. He remembered that his dear friend, Mr. Claye, had given it out that he, Bexendale, was indisposed. Indisposed!—it was indeed a blessed word. An indisposed person—even a curate—might be permitted a brandy-and-soda at any hour of the day or night. It was—medicine.

Young Mr. Bexendale revived at the mere thought of a drink, and he assumed his best curate manner and descended to the ground floor, where he turned into the smoking-room, quite oblivious of the fact that the manageress in the office close by had taken stock of his pale face and rather blood-shot eyes. There was no one in the smoking-room when Ninian entered, and he rang the bell timidly, and timidly awaited the advent of a waiter. When that functionary entered the young curate regarded him shyly.

"I—I—er—I am not feeling well this morning," he

said, nervously. "I think the sea-voyage yesterday afternoon upset me a little."

"Yessir,—very sorry, sir," said the waiter sympathetically. "Anything I can do, sir?"

"I was wondering if a little soda water, with a little brandy, would benefit me," said young Mr. Bexendale, fingering his chin.

"Brandy-and-soda, sir, yessir," said the waiter, quite unconcernedly. "Large brandy, sir?"

"If you please," answered the pseudo curate, "and a small soda."

Young Mr. Bexendale drank this fascinating mixture and felt much better after it. Life assumed fresher colours—all, he said, might yet be well. He thought he would like some breakfast—yes, decidedly, he could eat some breakfast now, and after that he would pay his bill, get his baggage and drive to Kingsbridge station in search of his friend, Mr. Claye. So he finished the last drop of the 'viver and marched into the coffee room. And there sat Miss Driscoll, looking very stern and very determined, and from Miss Driscoll's lips fell the startling words:—

"My God! Ninian Bexendale!"

Ninian Bexendale felt that the situation was full of unpleasantness. His soul sank from the heights to which it had been conducted by the brandy-and-soda to depths of something like despair. He turned soft at the stomach and weak at the knees—his face was first green, then red, then a sickly yellow. He looked furtively about him: there was no one in the coffee room but Miss Driscoll and himself. Young Mr. Bexendale endeavoured to put a bold face on matters.

"You are under some mistake, madam," he said in his best curate voice. "My name is Somerville."

He would have passed on, but Miss Driscoll rose and barred the way. Her eyes gleamed. Her mouth was grim and determined.

"You liar!" she hissed rather than said. "And you fool! Look at your signet ring."

Young Mr. Bexendale obediently lifted his hand and gazed at the ornament which Miss Driscoll was indicating with outstretched forefinger. It was a rather conspicuous ring at which he stared in a dull, mechanical fashion—very large, and very heavy, not quite in the best taste, nor in the best gold, and it bore a very large monogram—N. B. on the shield.

"Your signet-ring, I say!" repeated Miss Driscoll. "What a fool you are! I thought there was something familiar about your voice last night."

Even the greatest criminals, the most successful kings of crime, make small mistakes of detail which upset years of careful preparation for achieving a grand success. Young Mr. Bexendale was not a great criminal, not yet a clever man; he had much more of the character of the sneak thief about him than of a Charles Peace or a de Goncourt, but he had sufficient common sense to know that he was, as Miss Driscoll observed, a fool. It had never struck him, in the midst of all that elaborate contriving, that the ring would give him away.

The unfortunate young man glanced round him as a rat glances round the cage in which it is fairly trapped. His eyes wandered to the door.

"If you dare to take one step without my permission,"

said Miss Driscoll, "I'll have you inside a lock-up within ten minutes. Sit down!"

Young Mr. Bexendale collapsed into the nearest chair. Miss Driscoll rang the bell and summoned the waitress.

"Ask the manageress to step this way, if you please," she said, and took a seat exactly opposite that of her prisoner. "Don't you dare to move, now, young man," she commanded. "I'll make it hot for you if you do."

"Madam, I—I protest against this—this——"

"Protest as much as you like, my boy," said Miss Driscoll cheerily. "And much good may it do you. Come here, if you please," she added, as the manageress came into the coffee room and stared wild-eyed at the supposed curate's downcast attitude and pain-drawn face. "Is there a private room, anywhere in which this young man and myself, and you, if you please, can have a little conversation?"

"Come this way, madam," said the manageress, and walked out of the room in advance, feeling that she was going to hear new developments. "I will show you a private room."

Miss Driscoll signalled young Mr. Bexendale. Her demeanour was stern and fierce.

"No nonsense, now!" said she. "Follow the manageress, and remember that I'm behind you. Quick!"

Young Mr. Bexendale, forming the middle and principal part of the procession thus inaugurated, felt as if he were being led from a condemned cell to the scaffold. He was unpleasantly conscious that two waitresses had entered the coffee room and were viewing the proceedings with amazement which was not entirely without

amusement. He hung his head as he followed the manageress out of the room and into the hall, and his shifty eyes strayed towards the front door, through the glass panels of which he could see the sheds along the side of the Liffey, with blessèd free men loading and unloading wagons laden with merchandise. Oh! if he could but make a dash through that door, even if it were to throw himself into the river! His step lagged, his feet twitched.

"You try it on, my boy!" whispered Miss Driscoll. "March, I tell you!"

Young Mr. Bexendale marched—head down, heart crushed to a jelly, despair adding leaden weights to the soles of his feet. He was deserted by his dear friend, Mr. Claye: he had fallen into the hands of this she-dragon, the Driscoll woman, and everything was lost. And the worst of it was—he had lost his pluck. Too many cigarettes, too many whiskies-and-sodas, too much of what he called "Life," had destroyed the young gentleman's stamina to some considerable extent and left him resourceless, feeble, and miserable. As he followed the manageress up the wide staircase he was more and more reminded of the last mournful processions to the scaffold, and he could not help associating the determined Miss Driscoll with traditions of Calcroft, Jack Ketch, and Marwood.

The manageress opened the door of a room marked "Private" and stepped inside.

"We shall not be interrupted here, madam," she said.

Miss Driscoll motioned her prisoner to step within and the manageress to follow him. She herself brought up the rear and locked the door upon the three of them.

She bade the manageress sit down and pointed young Mr. Bexendale to a place on the hearth-rug.

"Now then, ma'am," she said, addressing the manageress, "I think we shall get to the bottom of this affair. You see this contemptible young scoundrel, masquerading in parson's clothes! he's the ne'er-do-well son of my solicitor, a good, honest, much-too-indulgent old gentleman. This fellow has been a bad lot all his life, and now he's turned to absolute crime. Now, then, you Ninian Bexendale, open your mouth and out with the truth!"

Ninian Bexendale's wits, sharpened by fear, were working a little better. He began to reckon matters up. After all, what charge could Miss Driscoll bring against him? there was no harm in masquerading as a clergyman, and he certainly hadn't got the diamonds.

"I've nothing to say to you, Miss Driscoll," he replied sulkily. "What right have you to treat me like this?"

"Hear him!" said Miss Driscoll, lifting hands and eyes. She went up and shook a substantial fist in his face. "You miserable puppy!" she said. "If you don't own up, I'll break every bone in your body, you little rat, you!"

Young Mr. Bexendale's physical senses succumbed. He measured Miss Driscoll's size and strength and grew frightened. He himself, in consequence of generous self-indulgence, possessed about as much muscle as a starved sparrow.

"Wh—what do you want to know?" he asked.

"What do I want to know? Everything, you wretched fool!" answered Miss Driscoll. "Don't I know as sure as I am made that you are at the bottom of the theft of

my diamonds? Who but you could have found out that I was travelling with them? You—and your precious confederate have got them."

"I'll swear I haven't," asserted this caged rat. "I've never seen them. I swear it! He may have got 'em, but I haven't had a hand in it, except to tell him about them. And now he's slung his hook!" mourned the victim of a misplaced confidence. "I never thought he'd treat me like that!"

"Are you going to tell the whole story and the whole truth!" asked Miss Driscoll, very threateningly, and with a strong accent on the final word of her question.

Thus adjured, young Mr. Bexendale made a virtue of necessity and for perhaps the first time in his life told a plain tale. He told it very well, too, and the manageress was fascinated, and horrified to think that such things should have gone on under her roof.

"And he was such a pleasant-mannered, polite gentleman!" she said, when the subordinate sinner had finished. "I saw him myself this morning when he left, and thought what nice manners he had! To think of his being a common thief!"

"An uncommon thief," said Miss Driscoll, with grim humour. "I see it all now. He must have tampered with my box last night when I was away from the room and he must have contrived to drug me. Also he must have escaped by the window. He's a clever villain, and much too clever for you, you miserable nincompoop!" she continued, turning to young Mr. Bexendale. "Where do you suppose he's gone, eh? What was settled between you as to disposing of my diamonds if you got them."

"We thought of taking them to Amsterdam," faltered the prisoner.

The manageress suddenly remembered the bit of paper which she had picked up in the missing man's room.

"I found this on the floor of Mr.—the other man's apartment," she said. "It seems to be a list of boats or trains. Perhaps you may find it of use, ma'am."

Miss Driscoll took the scrap of paper. It bore words of figures hastily jotted down—evidently from a time table.

"Westland Row, 7.45. Kingston Pier, 8. Holyhead, 12. Euston, 5.55—Why," she said, "this seems to be merely the times of the day mail from here. What did the man write that down for—he could have carried it in his head? I know, it's a blind. He wanted us to think he was off to England. Never mind—I'll have him and I'll have my diamonds yet."

"May—may I go?" asked young Mr. Bexendale.

"Go? You'll go to prison, my boy!" answered Miss Driscoll with cheerful promptitude. "That's where you'll go. Go, indeed! I think I see you."

She motioned to the manageress, who followed her from the apartment. Young Mr. Bexendale found himself alone—locked in.

He sat cursing his fate and himself for a good hour, and then the key turned in the lock and Miss Driscoll reappeared, and she was followed by a very tall and very muscular man in a tweed suit, who smiled pleasantly and determinedly and twiddled a heavy military-looking moustache as he gazed at the unhappy prisoner.

"This he?" asked the portentous personage.

"This is he," answered Miss Driscoll.

The detective glanced, in an amused fashion, at a long narrow parcel which Miss Driscoll carried, wrapped up in brown paper, in her right hand.

"Going to carry out that little ceremony you spoke of?" he said smiling.

"I am," replied Miss Driscoll, with grim determination.

"I'll wait outside till it's over," said the man, laughing. "Don't let him make too much music."

He laughed again and retired, closing the door softly upon Miss Driscoll and her prisoner. The latter, trembling in every limb, gazed at his jailer in sheer terror.

"Take off that coat!" commanded Miss Driscoll.

"Wh—wh——" began the victim.

"Coat!" said Miss Driscoll, with a stamp of her foot.

The coat came off.

"Waistcoat!"

The unhappy youth's waistcoat followed.

"Collar—tie—shirt!" ordered Miss Driscoll, with three successive stamps. "Off with each—I'll kill you if you don't!"

Young Mr. Bexendale, with a face as white as a sheet of paper, undressed swiftly. He stood trembling like a leaf, in a thin vest and his trousers, and he gazed at the awful woman, as a rabbit gazes at a snake that is going to kill it.

"Down on your knees!" commanded the woman who had got the whip hand.

Young Mr. Bexendale went on his knees. And then Miss Driscoll drew out of its paper wrappings a brand-new riding switch—the sort they use in heavy cavalry

regiments, with a steel core running through it. At the sight of it the abject figure of the hearth-rug set up a howl for mercy.

At the end of ten minutes the detective put his head through the door.

"I say," he said apologetically, "don't kill him! leave a bit of him."

Miss Driscoll gave the writhing and shrieking figure on the floor one last savage cut, and threw the switch away. And then she gave Mr. Ninian Bexendale into custody on the charge of being concerned in the theft of her diamonds.

CHAPTER III

A QUICK CHANGE ARTIST

Mr. Richard Claye, as Miss Driscoll had wisely observed, was an uncommon thief. The younger son of a country parson, he had been turned out of his father's house at the age of seventeen with a hundred pounds in his pockets and permission to provide for himself in future. He had provided for himself ever since, and notwithstanding the ups and downs of a career which afforded great scope for variety and adventure, had done himself very well. He had played many parts in his time, and had never set any great store by honesty, and one of the things which proved him to be uncommon was the fact that he saw no necessity for honour amongst thieves. In securing the diamonds in his own way, and in appropriating them to his own use, Mr. Claye conceived that he was doing quite the right thing. He knew well enough that if Ninian Bexendale could have effected the robbery himself he would have done so without any help from him; he also knew that Ninian would keep the whole of the proceeds of the robbery if he only got the chance to do so; therefore he, Mr. Claye, had the right to treat Ninian as Ninian would have treated him. He did not take the trouble to reckon up any accounts between them—he merely put his friend and fellow-conspirator completely out of mind as soon as he found that he had no further use for him. Until the exact moment wherein

Mr. Claye discovered that the diamonds were as good as his, he had meant to share with his young friend—not in equal shares perhaps, for that would have been unjust, seeing that he, Mr. Claye, was responsible for most of the work and trouble, but at any rate in some way. But when Ninian Bexendale, as a unit of any value, dropped clean out of the matter (that state of the proceedings being reached when Mr. Claye realized that the diamonds were to all intents and purposes at his disposal) the senior partner took over the entire going concern in his own way, and forgot that his junior existed. He did not even give him any consideration in the matter of settling his hotel bill.

Mr. Claye had secured the diamonds in very simple fashion. At exactly one o'clock in the morning, by which time he knew that Miss Driscoll would be under the complete influence of the powerful narcotic which he had sprinkled about her pillow and her nightgown, he repaired to her door, turned the key from without by the use of a pair of steel tweezers, and forced the bolt plate off by one gentle, steady, push inwards. So absolutely certain was he of the success of his plans that his first proceeding on entering the room was to close and lock the door, turn on the electric light, and immediately set to work to repair the bolt-plate. He knew quite well that Miss Driscoll would have slept through a railway accident or the worst sort of thunderstorm, for he had tested that particular species of narcotic before. So he made the door safe before he secured the diamonds, more from a whimsical pleasure than from any other reason, and as he fastened the screws again he laughed to himself to think how puzzled everybody would be when the

thing came to be looked into. He secured the diamonds just as easily as he had obtained access to the room, and when that was done there was nothing to do but go out by the window. And that, to Mr. Claye, a special adept at anything he undertook, from book-making to theft, was a very easy thing indeed. He had examined the exterior of the premises earlier in the evening, and had made his preparations. Outside the window was a ledge sufficiently broad to allow of a safe foothold, and it was no difficult task for Mr. Claye to climb out of the casement, reclose it to the exact inch at which Miss Driscoll had left it open, and traverse the slight space between her room and his. That accomplished, Mr. Claye had mixed himself a tumbler of whisky-and-water, drunk it off with great relish, and gone to sleep, feeling that he had accomplished a good night's work. As for the diamond necklace, it reposed beneath his pillow, in company with his watch and chain and purse, for Mr. Claye believed in keeping his property as close to him as possible when he slept in a strange house.

He woke very early next morning, took a cold bath, shaved, dressed, ate a hearty breakfast, left a message for his young friend, Mr. Somerville, who at that moment was entirely under the influence of Mr. Claye's narcotic, and left the hotel after paying his bill, tipping everybody, and exchanging a pleasant word or two with the manageress. And like the great man that he was, Mr. Claye proceeded straight to Kingsbridge, knowing well that if a hue and cry should be raised after him rather earlier than he had expected, Kingsbridge would be the last place in which they would look for him, simply because he had told the manageress he was going there.

On the departure platform at Kingsbridge he engaged a dressing-room and had his baggage taken into it. And then he exchanged his clerical suit and hat for a tweed suit and a soft cap, and with this first change made in his appearance he left the station, baggage and all, on a car whose driver was instructed to take him to Lower Abbey Street. It was still early in the morning and Mr. Claye held his head erect as he drove along the quay sides and through the streets—unlike his late junior partner, he was no coward.

Mr. Claye gave his jarvey instructions to pull up in Lower Abbey Street, at a small establishment which was manifestly given over to the sale of drink. The merits of John Jameson's Whisky, of Bass's Pale Ale, of Guinness's Double Stout, were freely extolled in the window; on the signboard over the door appeared the name Phelim Hanrahan. A red-headed boy, lazily wielding a broom, was sweeping the threshold of this establishment when Mr. Claye drove up, and he evinced no surprise at seeing an arrvial at such an early hour of the morning. In answer to Mr. Claye's inquiries he replied that Mr. Hanrahan had just risen and was in the shop, and at that Mr. Claye bade the jarvey bring the traps inside. Then he walked in, and passing through the outer shop in a fashion which showed that he knew his whereabouts, pushed open a door and entered an inner sanctum where he discovered a very tall, very stout man, engaged in pouring the contents of a large bottle of soda-water into a tumbler of ample proportions which already contained a liberal allowance of brandy. The large, tall man looked up, and stared at his visitor half-angrily: then, as he recognized him through the somewhat gloomy atmosphere

of the sanctum, his face relaxed into a broad grin, and he set down his bottle of soda-water and his large tumbler, and stretched out a hand that closely resembled a small leg of mutton.

"Jim!" said he, in a voice that was thoroughly and unmistakably English, "who'd ha' thought o' seeing you here, old pal! Just come across, eh! Well, my boy, you're in time for what our Scottish friends call your 'mornin'.' What'll you take, Jim? Give it a name."

"Wait till I pay the jarvey, Joe," answered Mr. Claye, who had gripped his friend's hand with as much enthusiasm as the friend had displayed. "I've got a trap or two that I want to bring inside."

"There's a red-headed young devil sweeping outside there," said the big man. "Make him carry 'em in. Here you, Rafferty, bring in the gentleman's trunks, or bags, or what the devil it is he's carrying. And what'll you take, Jim, old man?" he continued, when the coast had been cleared and he and Mr. Claye were safely closeted together. "A b-&-s, or a drop of the wine of this country? A J—J—now?"

"For God's sake, no!" answered Mr. Claye, making a wry face. "I can stand as much whisky as would float a gunboat at night, but I bar spirits in the morning, unless it's a brandy-and-soda."

"Ha—ha—ha—!" laughed the big man. "Unless is a good word. Which'll you have—Martel or Hennessy?"

"Martell," answered Mr. Claye. "And play light with it, Joe, old man—I'm a bit of an abstemious party in the morning."

"Right you are, my boy—that plenty?" said the big man, pouring out the brandy with one hand and reaching

for a bottle of soda with the other. "Here you are—and I'm glad to see you—your health, Jim."

"Your health, Joe," responded Mr. Claye, sipping the mixture. "Very nice that, Joe, old man. There's one thing about Ireland; you can be certain of getting decent spirits wherever you go instead of the damned poison one gets in Christian England."

"Ah, but how many Englishmen are there who know a drop of good spirit when they taste it?" asked the other. "The Irish are better judges. And what brings you here at this time, Jim?"

"A little matter of business, Joe. How's your business, by the by," asked Mr. Claye, sipping his drink with a somewhat preoccupied air.

"Very decent, Jim, very decent. Not quite, perhaps, all that the executors of the late lamented Mr. Phelim Hanrahan represented it to be, but not far off," replied the stout man. "I've nothing to grumble at—the takings are a good deal more than they were at the old place in Leeds. I've never regretted coming over here, though there's nothing so certain as that Ireland isn't England, and especially the Yorkshire part of the predominant partner."

"No," answered Mr. Claye. He sipped at his drink again and his eyes became meditative. "Joe," he continued presently, "I want to lay quiet for a day or two, and to change my identity. A little matter of business, you understand."

"Right you are, my boy," said Mr. Claye's friend. "This is the spot, and I'm the man. There's a nice little room upstairs that you can call your own if you're so minded, and as to changing your identity, why, I don't

know anybody who's a quicker change artist than you are, Jim."

"Thank you," said Mr. Claye, "I don't know about using the room yet, Joe. I've another notion, but I'd be glad of it for an hour or two. And look here, Joe, old man,—you see that set of well-worn golf clubs?—I want you to put 'em safely out of sight, and also that bag of mine when I've done with it—somewhere, you understand, where they won't easily be found."

"It shall be done, Jim, it shall be done," said his good friend. "Anything that you wish shall be done. Good business this time, Jim?"

"It isn't quite finished, Joe, but it's begun well," replied Mr. Claye. "I'll go up to that nice little room you were talking of, and make a few trifling alterations in my appearance, if you please."

The stout man once more laid himself, his house, and his fortune at Mr. Claye's feet. He picked up his guest's bag and puffed his way up several flights of stairs with it, finally piloting Mr. Claye into a small apartment under the roof; where he set the bag on a chair and pantingly inquired if there was nothing more he could do to serve his old friend Jim.

"Nothing, Joe," replied the old friend. "Unless it's to take these damned golf clubs into the yard and burn 'em. Put 'em right out of sight, old man, while I make up—I shall be a military person when I come downstairs."

The stout man chuckled as he retreated, for he knew his friend's powers and admired them. He went downstairs, finished his brandy-and-soda, lighted a cigar, and put the golf clubs in a very safe place. After that he picked up the newspaper and read and smoked until his

visitor came back to him. When he heard the sound of Mr. Claye's feet on the stairs he looked up, prepared to criticize that gentleman's appearance. As his eyes fell on his descending figure the stout man uttered a gutteral exclamation which signified approval.

"Very good, very good, indeed, my boy," he said, clapping his leg-of-mutton fist on the nearest table. "Your own mother, if she's alive, wouldn't know you." Mr. Claye reflected that he would much rather be recognized by his mother than by some other people of whom he was aware, but he did not say so. He went over to a pier glass and looked at himself again, and he felt that the landlord's encomiums were deserved. It was a very different looking Mr. Claye, who stood staring at his reflection in the glass, to the Mr. Claye who had entered the little drinking shop half an hour earlier. This Mr. Claye was at least twenty years older; he had lines in his cheeks and wrinkles in his forehead, his hair was grey; he wore a thick, grizzled moustache, and he carried his left arm in a sling fashioned out of a black silk handkerchief. There was a military precision in his bearing; he looked like a half-pay officer of good rank.

"It's uncommon good, Jim, my boy!" said the corpulant landlord. "You were always good at that game."

"Would you mind putting that bag out of the way, Joe?" said Mr. Claye, in quite a new voice. "Put it where you put the golf things. I dare say that if I want a portmanteau for a day or two you've got something of the sort that you could lend me?"

"To be sure, my boy," said Mr. Claye's friend. "I've just the thing, and as I've said before, anything I have is at your disposal."

He carried the bag away, and Mr. Claye once more regarded his new make-up in the mirror. He was conscious of his powers in that direction, and he said to himself that if he went straight back to the hotel he might show his face in the coffee-room, or smoking-room, or at the office, without fear of recognition. It was with a feeling of real satisfaction with himself and the world in general that he sat down and lighted a cigar.

CHAPTER IV

SET A THIEF TO CATCH A THIEF

Miss Driscoll's arm was none of the weakest, and she had administered such a sound thrashing to young Mr. Bexendale that the detective decided that the culprit had better be rested and refreshed before being conveyed to the police station. On his own initiative he assisted the sobbing and trembling young man to dress; he got him a stiff brandy-and-soda and did something to console him.

"She's a powerful woman, Miss Driscoll," said the detective, as he helped the victim on with his coat. "She laid into you, I guess?"

"Sh—sh—she's a f—f—fiend!" sobbed young Mr. Bexendale. "A p—powerful fiend!"

"Well, well you must allow for her feelings," said the detective. "How would you like being robbed of fifty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds?"

"I wish I'd never had anything to do with the diamonds," wailed the unhappy youth. "A precious lot of good I've got out of 'em!"

"Ah!" said the detective oracularly, "that's generally the way."

Then he went downstairs and himself carried his prisoner some food and bade him eat and drink and pull himself together, and having accomplished this errand of mercy he locked him up again and went to find

Miss Driscoll, who, having had no breakfast, was now regaling herself in the coffee room.

"I wished to have a little conversation with you, madam," said the detective.

"Certainly," answered Miss Driscoll, who was now in an excellent temper. "Sit down and have some breakfast. Let me see—your name is——?"

"Sergeant Davidson, at your service, ma'am," answered the detective, who seemed inclined to accept Miss Driscoll's offer of breakfast, and who now took a chair on the other side of the table at which the lady was seated.

"Well, sergeant, what is it you want to talk about?" inquired Miss Driscoll, at the same time motioning the waitress to hand the bill of fare to her guest.

"Why, madam," answered the sergeant, "I've been wondering whether it is your best policy to hand the youngster upstairs over to us or not. Your great object is to get back the missing property, is it not?"

"That's the first object," admitted Miss Driscoll. "I naturally want to recover the diamonds, and to do so as quickly as possible. I shall want to punish the scoundrel who's made off with them."

"Well, I've been wondering whether it wouldn't pay you better to make use of the young man upstairs rather than lock him up," said Davidson. "My theory about Claye is that he'll remain here in Dublin for some days. He'll know quite well that he'll be looked for carefully at all the English ports with which Dublin has communication, and he'll not leave just yet. He'll also be a bit afraid of going either south or north, because he'll know that he'll be watched for at Cork, Belfast, Waterford and Londonderry. You may feel assured that he's here in

Dublin, ma'am, and will remain here until he feels it safe to leave."

"Well, about Bexendale?" asked Miss Driscoll.

"My notion is that he might be useful in looking for the other man," said the sergeant. "It may be that we don't know all that he knows yet, but I reckon that you've so broken his spirit, ma'am, with that riding-switch, that we could get the greatest secret he has from him."

"I'm inclined to do just what you wish, Sergeant Davidson," replied Miss Driscoll in slow accents. "I don't want this young rascal to go unpunished, though."

"We can keep an eye on him, ma'am," said the detective. "Keep him without money, oblige him to report himself at stated times, and he can't go far. My notion was to let him wander about Dublin for a few days or so with instructions to keep his eyes open for Claye."

"Do you really think that's any good?" asked Miss Driscoll.

"Yes, I do, or I couldn't recommend it," answered the sergeant, falling to work on the eggs and bacon which he had ordered from the waitress. "I think I can make the youngster very useful indeed in tracing Claye, if you can get him to agree to my proposals."

"Get him?" exclaimed Miss Driscoll with wide-open eyes. "I should think there was no question of that, sergeant. Get him, indeed!—the sight of my riding-switch will soon terrify him into anything."

"I wouldn't be too free with that implement of torture," said the sergeant, with a broad smile. "I'm afraid you rather overstepped the law this morning and that I am guilty of aiding and abetting, but I've no doubt it did the young man good."

"A lot of good," said Miss Driscoll emphatically. "He ought to have had periodical doses of the same medicine administered to him years ago. But his father is much too easy going and far too weak."

"A well-known solicitor, I think you said, ma'am?" inquired the detective. "Well, you never know what to expect. Let's hope this experience will enable the young fellow to turn over a new leaf. Now, ma'am, if you'll leave matters to me, I'll see that all goes on right—I'll make use of this youngster in my own way, and I'll carry on the usual investigation. I've a notion, ma'am, that a quiet policy will pay best in this case."

"I will leave it with you, then, sergeant," said Miss Driscoll.

"I suppose you'll be staying in Dublin for a while, ma'am?" inquired Sergeant Davidson.

"I shall stay here, in this house, until something is ascertained," replied Miss Driscoll, with great determination. "It's not agreeable to my previous plans, but here I stay."

The sergeant nodded his head, and finished his breakfast in silence. He rose at last, and looked at his hostess, and smiled quietly.

"I'm just going upstairs to try a little moral suasion on the young man," he said. "I'll come down again, presently, and let you know how he seems disposed, ma'am."

He climbed slowly upstairs to the first floor and admitted himself to the room wherein the sad and sinful Bexendale junior sat chewing the bitter cud of his reflections as a species of dessert after his solitary meal. He shrank together when the door opened, and he seemed

relieved when he found that Sergeant Davidson was alone.

"Well," said the sergeant, not unkindly. "Feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you, sir," replied the sinner.

"That's right," said the sergeant. He took a chair and lighted a cigar, and passed another to his prisoner. "I've just had a talk with Miss Driscoll," he continued, fingering his cigar. "About you, you know!"

"Yes," said young Mr. Bexendale. "Am I—are you going to lock me up?"

"Well," said the sergeant, "that, of course, is what usually follows in such cases as this, but Miss Driscoll is inclined to be merciful."

Young Mr. Bexendale's eyes opened—his arms and his back tingled still; it came as a surprise to him that Miss Driscoll could feel any mercy for anybody.

"Yes," repeated the sergeant, "Miss Driscoll is inclined to be merciful, if she finds some evidence of repentance, and of wish to make reparation in you, young man."

The young man at that moment would gladly have slain Miss Driscoll by means of horrible tortures, but as he was very weak and wobbly, and as the tears started to his eyes as he scanned the sergeant, he was not only full of penitence, but anxious to make all the reparation in his power.

"Very good," said the sergeant. "I shan't say, mind you, what will eventually happen, but if you do as you're told and give me the assistance I want, I promise you it'll be the better for you."

"I'll do anything, sir," eagerly responded the culprit. "What is it you want me to do?"

"I want you," replied Sergeant Davidson, "to help me to find the man who's got Miss Driscoll's diamonds."

A gleam of malice shot across young Mr. Bexendale's features, and his fingers tightened themselves at the thought of Mr. Claye's perfidy.

"Ah, wouldn't I like it, just," he cried. "I'll pay him out for his meanness in sneaking off as he did. What can I do, sir?"

"It's my belief," replied the detective, "that Claye's here in Dublin and will remain here for some little time. Now, I want you, Bexendale"—his voice assumed a stern, business-like tone at which the young person addressed trembled a little—"I want you to act entirely under my orders. I shall take you away from here and find you lodgings where you'll be under my own supervision and surveillance. I shall make you up in a disguise and turn you out into the city with definite instructions. And don't you forget, young man, that while you are keeping your eyes open for a sign or a trace of Claye other eyes will be kept on you, and," concluded Sergeant Davidson, with a still sterner note in his voice, "if you try to play me false you'll see the inside of a prison cell within half an hour."

Young Mr. Bexendale fluttered and trembled. He had an instinctive horror of a prison; it made him ill to think of it.

"I'm sure, sir," he answered, trying to throw as much sincerity into his voice as he possibly could, "I'm sure I'll do my best and try to deserve your confidence. But there's one thing I may as well tell you, and that is that Claye's awfully smart and cute, and he's—he's a bit dangerous, too!"

"Ah," said the detective. "Dangerous? How do you mean?"

"He always carries a revolver," answered young Mr. Bexendale. "And he's the sort to use it, if he's pressed."

"Well, we must act accordingly," said Davidson. "I want to get him quietly if we can. Now then—I'll go and settle your bill, and you can give me the money if you have it—and get your things and off we'll go. And I'll tell you something, young man,—although you could go to penal servitude for this, if you assist in recovering the diamonds you'll not only get off, but you'll be rewarded."

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed the prisoner with heartfelt gratitude. "I'm much obliged to you, indeed. I've got money to pay my bill, sir," and he held out a five pound note. Sergeant Davidson took the note, without inquiring how Mr. Ninian Bexendale had become possessed of it, and left the room: the grateful young man looked at his reflection in the mirror and grinned at himself.

"I'll beat them all yet," he mused, "all the lot of 'em. I'd like to cut Claye's liver out if I could get at him —the mean skunk! And as for that she-dragon—eh! Never mind. I'll settle with her yet."

The sergeant presently returned, with the receipted bill, and the news that Mr. Bexendale's baggage had been placed in a four-wheeled cab.

"And out of consideration for you feelings, young man," he continued, "I've sent the cab on to the station entrance, and you and me can join it there by way of the covered passage, so that you won't have to pass the [illegible]he entrance hall. And now, come along, and

mind all I've told you, and don't you try any tricks."

"I assure you, sir, I have no intention of playing any tricks," said Ninian, as he followed the detective from the private room. "I am only too glad to be able to atone for my misdeeds."

"Umph!" said Sergeant Davidson. "Well, we'll go and begin the atoning business, and see what you can do."

He took his man down to the cab by way of the staircase and then drove him off to his own house, where he set to work on effecting a difference in young Mr. Bexendale's personal appearance which would have done the highest credit to Mr. Claye himself. Within half an hour the young man's personality was entirely changed, and Miss Driscoll herself would not have recognized him. He wore a suit of very old and seedy second-hand clothes, with boots to match; a big red neckerchief encircled his throat; his head was covered by an old cap. The sergeant, after trimming his hair until it was almost level with his scalp, fitted him with a beautifully made red wig, and then proceeded to make up a complexion for him. Over the left eye he fitted a black patch—and the transformation was complete. Young Mr. Bexendale did not know his own face, and he said to himself that nothing would be easier than to cut and run under such a disguise. But the sergeant was anxious that the police should know him, and he was unkind enough to parade him before a large assemblage in barrack yard and to promise another parade at night. And then he turned him into the street with final instructions.

"You're a loafer," he said. "Wander round and keep your eyes open. If you see anything, communicate with me by wire, but don't lose sight of your man if [illegible] n

help it. If you want help show the badge I gave you to any constable. And remember that we're watching you."

Young Mr. Bexendale wandered forth on his mission. Sergeant Davidson had turned him into the street with only a couple of shillings in his pocket, and with no other solace than a clay pipe and a paper of tobacco, these articles of luxury being more in keeping with his character than cigars or cigarettes. It was not a cheerful prospect, but it was better than sitting in a prison cell.

He was to wander where he liked, about the principal streets, around the public buildings, to linger wherever he pleased, on the bridges, the quays, or the open spaces. But he was to use his best judgment as to all this and to decide for himself as to the most likely places in which Claye would be found. Unfortunately, he had been unable to convince the sergeant that Claye would most likely be discovered in saloon bars, or billiard rooms—that sage gentleman bade Mr. Bexendale keep to the streets.

He tramped over a good deal of Dublin that day without achieving any success, and he went home to the sergeant at night rather foot sore and a little bit downhearted. But the sergeant fed him and warmed him and cheered him up, and if he did keep him under lock and key for the night he gave him a grateful and generous dose of hot grog before he retired to rest, and provided a handsome breakfast for him next morning, so that his heart was comforted within him.

And next day young Mr. Bexendale hit on a stroke of luck. He was strolling aimlessly along Sackville Street, hands in pockets and clay pipe in mouth, the very picture of a down-at-heel loafer, when he caught sight of a very

tall and very corpulent man who was rolling, rather than walking, towards him. He did not notice the loafer, but the loafer noticed him and was filled with wonder.

"Blessed if that isn't Joe Kilner that used to keep the oyster bar in Upperhead Row in Leeds!" he exclaimed. "What the devil is he doing here?"

Young Mr. Bexendale turned and followed Mr. Joseph Kilner at a slow pace.

CHAPTER V

YOUNG MR. BEXENDALE IS SILENCED

THE big man rolled slowly along, sometimes nodding to an acquaintance, sometimes pausing to look at the goods displayed in a shop window, once or twice stopping to exchange a word or two with folk who met him. He appeared to be in no hurry, and the loafer who followed in his wake was in no hurry either. Whenever Mr. Kilner paused or loitered Mr. Bexendale found it easy work to pull himself up, stare in the windows or relight the contents of his clay pipe. In this way he followed the stout man about until Lower Abbey Street was reached and there he beheld him enter a small drinking saloon over which appeared the name *Phelim Hanrahan.*

Up to this moment and indeed for some moments later, Bexendale had no more reason for following Mr. Joseph Kilner than that of idle curiosity. He had recognized him in Sackville Street as a man who up to three years previously had kept a small oyster bar in Leeds and had since disappeared. Young Mr. Bexendale had sometimes taken an oyster supper at this bar or had called for half a score of best natives early in the morning when he did not feel very well, and he had often exchanged opinions with the proprietor, usually on matters relative to horse-racing or the prize ring. He therefore felt much interest in Mr. Kilner, and had he been himself instead of what he seemed he would have gone up to him and greeted

him warmly as an old acquaintance. But under present circumstances he could only gaze at Mr. Kilner's mountainous figure and think of old times.

He stood in Lower Abbey Street for some time staring at the door of the saloon, and wondering why Mr. Kilner did not come out. The advertisements of Bass and Guinness, Martell and Hennessy, Power and Jameson in the window presently acted so strongly upon his imagination that he decided to take a drink himself, and he jingled a few coppers in his pocket and started across the street with a thirsty tongue and itching lips. He walked into the saloon; there, behind the bar, his coat off, his shirt sleeves rolled up, his leg-of-mutton hand engaged in polishing glass with a white cloth, stood Mr. Kilner, just as much at home amongst his bottles and barrels as he had once been amongst his Blue Points and Whitstables.

Mr. Bexendale dissembled with marked success. He selected three coppers from a little handful which he drew from his pocket and asked for a bottle of Bass as he laid them on the counter. Mr. Kilner selected a bottle of Bass, uncorked it, poured it carefully into a tall glass, held it up to the light and estimated its qualities with one eye closed and the other screwed up and set it before his customer with a flourish.

"If that ain't in prime condition," said Mr. Kilner, "call me a Dutchman," and he swept the three coppers into his till and resumed his glasses and his cloth.

Young Mr. Bexendale rolled the amber liquor over his palate, which had been a hot one from his youth upward.

"Very nice indeed!" he said. "You know how to keep bottled beer, mister, you do!"

Mr. Kilner took the compliment with a gracious countenance, and smiled in an elephantine fashion.

"Ale," he said, "that is to say, bottled ale, is no use unless it is in good condition. It should drink sharp, I reckon," he continued, glancing at his customer, "I reckon you're from England."

"You're right," answered Mr. Bexendale.

"And from the North country," said Mr. Kilner, with a strong emphasis on the conjunction.

"Well, thereabouts," replied the customer, smacking his lips once more over the beer.

"I used to live in Leeds myself, once," said Mr. Kilner, evidently inclined to be expansive in the presence of a compatriot, "but I'm a Warwickshire man by rights."

"Oh, indeed," said young Mr. Bexendale. "Are you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Kilner, "but I'm very well where I am. What might you have been doing to your eye?"

"Fell down the blooming hatchway in my ship," answered Mr. Bexendale, "and caught the eyebrow on the corner of a chest. Wonder it didn't do for me."

"Ah! I should think so," said Mr. Kilner sympathetically. "A very tender place is the eyebrow. It——"

At this moment the door of the inner sanctum swung open and there emerged a military-looking man very correctly attired in a neat suit of dark blue serge, who carried his left arm in a sling made out of a black silk handkerchief. He nodded affably to the man behind the bar, bestowed a quick, keen glance at the loafer with the

black patch, and marched out into the street, twirling the points of his grizzled moustache with a very white hand. The loafer saw the hand as it moved upwards, and he set down his glass on the counter and breathed a gentle sigh. Young Mr. Bexendale had found Richard Claye.

He was as dead certain that he had run his quarry to earth as that he was himself. He knew the strong white hand with an absolute knowledge—it had two disfiguring marks, one, a little blue anchor tattooed on the back of the wrist, the other, the lack of one half of the third finger. There was no disputing that evidence, the man in the quiet, unassuming, well-cut suit, the man with the aristocratic bearing and handsome grizzled moustache was Richard Claye, without a doubt.

Young Mr. Bexendale began to think hard. It was evident that Claye was lying hidden with Kilner, who was no doubt an old friend of his. Was it possible that Kilner was in the secret? Bexendale thought not; Claye was not likely to sacrifice one pennyworth of the diamonds now that he had got them all to himself. Now—how would it be if it were suggested to Kilner, that he and Bexendale should secure the prize, or at any rate force Claye to part with proportionate shares of it. To this young man's mind no man was above sordid considerations; it was not in his mental economy to conceive of a person living who would not sell his soul for a reasonable sum. He had no desire to return the diamands to the Driscoll woman—not he! he'd rather see her in hell first, he remarked with force. He wanted the diamonds for himself—it was a pity that one must take another man into partnership in order to get them, but

just as he had been obliged to seek Claye's help in Leeds, so he was now obliged to obtain Kilner's in Dublin.

The man in the loafer's suit gazed critically out of his one eye at the big man behind the counter. He suddently leaned over the barrier and addressing the astonished Mr. Kilner in a whisper, said:—

"I say, guv'nor, let me have a word with you in private."

The stout man put down his cloth and the glass which he was just then polishing.

"Eh!" he said, "if it's borrowing money, my lad——"

"I don't want to borrow anything," said young Mr. Bexendale. "I just want a word or two with you about a private matter."

Mr. Kilner seemed astonished, but he motioned his customer to pass through the swing door into the sanctum, and there into a species of sitting-room at the back.

"What is it?" he inquired, looking down at Mr. Bexendale from his superior height.

"You don't know me," said Mr. Bexendale, "but I know you. I've had many a dozen oysters at your bar in Leeds."

"Have you?" said Mr. Kilner suspiciously. "So have hundreds of folks. What then?"

"Keep your hair on," said Mr. Bexendale, soothingly. "I'd reckon you'd remember me if I'd take off this damned wig and this patch and had my own clothes on."

"Look here, my lad," remarked Mr. Kilner, "you listen to me. If this is some——"

"Keep your hair on, I say," said Mr. Bexendale, who was enjoying the situation. "Here, I'll relieve your sus-

pense. That was Dick Claye that went out just now."

"Was it," said Mr. Kilner. "Dear me! And who, may I ask, is Dick Claye?"

"There are times," said Mr. Bexendale with nonchalant carelessness, "when he's known as Jim Creighton, which, for all I know, may be his real name. But in Leeds he's known as Richard Claye, and Richard Claye is just now badly wanted by the Dublin police."

Kilner folded his arms and breathed hard.

"Look here, my boy!" he said. "Who the devil are you, and what do you want?"

"That's right," said young Mr. Bexendale. "Now, we're getting to business. If you'll take a seat, I'll tell you everything."

Mr. Kilner, however, maintained a standing position. He gave a backward look through the sanctum into the outer shop, called to his assistant to attend to the counter for a few minutes, and then closed the door of his room. Then he consented to sit down, and he took a chair opposite to that occupied by Mr. Bexendale and planting his leg-of-mutton hands firmly on his large knees he looked his visitor squarely in the eye.

"Now then, young fellow," he said, "let's know what you're after?"

"I'm after property of my own that Dick Claye has got," answered the other. "And I'm offering you a share in it if you'll help me to get it. I reckon you're not above doing a good turn for yourself, are you? And this is a big job—none of your two-penny-half-penny affairs."

"Let's hear all about it," repeated Mr. Kilner.

Young Mr. Bexendale reflected for a moment or two.

He saw no way of obtaining the diamonds now save with Mr. Kilner's help. It wasn't a one man job, anyway—he must have a partner. So he took the plunge.

"I'm trusting you, mind," he said, "and I'm going to give you such a chance as few men get," and with this preface he told Mr. Kilner the whole story of the diamonds from the moment in which he had seen Miss Driscoll produce them in his father's private office to that of their disappearance from the hotel in custody of Mr. Claye.

"And did you ever hear of a dirtier trick than that? concluded the narrator. "To sneak off from a pal that had trusted him with everything and put him on to one of the best jobs of the last hundred years! He deserves roasting alive for it—that's what he deserves, damn him!"

"You said," remarked Mr. Kilner after a brief silence, during which each man studied the other's face, "you said as how the police are after Jim—Claye, as you call him? How do you know?"

"Because I do know," retorted young Mr. Bexendale. "What do you suppose I'm in this get-up for? They collared me at the hotel, curse 'em, and I only got off by giving a solemn promise to help them to find Claye. They know he's hanging around in Dublin. It's Sergeant Davidson's idea, that, and you see he isn't far wrong."

"Oh, he isn't, isn't he?" replied Mr. Kilner. "And so you came into my place on the look-out, did you?"

"I saw you in Sackville Street," said Mr. Bexendale, "and I recognized you as Joe Kilner that used to keep the oyster shop in Upperhead Row. And I followed you

just out of curiosity—I hadn't a notion that you were the proprietor, or whatever you are, of this place. And then I saw Claye."

"And supposing, Mister, that I don't fall in with your arguments," said Mr. Kilner, "supposing that I don't see my way to go into partnership with you in this matter of the diamonds, what then?"

Young Mr. Bexendale smiled.

"Why, then," said he, "I'm afraid you'll have a visit from the police—in search of a gentleman with a false moustache and a lame arm (which isn't lame) in a sling, and whose right hand is tattooed at the wrist and is minus half of one finger. That's what'll happen."

Mr. Kilner nodded his heavy head.

"As for the police," he said, "they make no difference to me; I've nothing to do with 'em, nor they with me. What they might have to say to a friend or lodger of mine as happens to be staying in my house is no concern of mine."

Young Mr. Bexendale reverted to his original line.

"Look here, mister," he said wheedingly, "those diamonds are worth every penny of fifty thousand pounds. If Claye's staying in your house what's easier than for you and me to get them from him? There's more ways than one. Nobody knows but you and me—nobody has the least notion that I'm here. Of course, if you and me can't come to terms, well, I shall just go straight to Davidson and tell him where Claye's hidden."

"There weren't any of the police with you when you came in here?" asked Mr. Kilner, eyeing his guest over with dubious glances. "Nobody waiting for you—outside?"

"You bet!" replied Mr. Bexendale, with obvious belief in the truth of his own statement. "No—not a soul in the world knows I'm here. I want to work this on my own hook, mister—I don't want to help Davidson unless I'm forced to it."

Mr. Kilner seemed to think hard for a few moments.

"If you're not pressed for time," he said presently. "I'll just think things over and see what I might do. I'd like to know if Claye has the stuff on him, or if he's put it away."

"It's on him, you bet!" replied Mr. Bexendale with great confidence.

"Well, I'll think it over a bit," said Mr. Kilner. "If I could see my way to doing it quietly, I might be inclined to go in with you. Look here," he continued, rising, "it's not safe for you to be here. Claye might be in any minute. If you'll come with me I'll put you in a room where you can be quite safe until we can talk again. Here, take a cigar or two out of that box; you may as well be comfortable while you wait."

Mr. Kilner himself picked up a decanter of whisky, a siphon of soda water, and a tumbler, and carried them in front of his guest, who eyed these provisions with great favour. He conducted Mr. Bexendale along some narrow and dirty corridors to a small room, lighted by one dirty window which looked into a narrow yard, and there he left him. It was then about two o'clock in the afternoon, and for two hours young Mr. Bexendale was happy with his liquor and his cigars and the newspaper. About four o'clock he began to get tired of waiting, and he tried the door with the notion of going out. The door was locked—he was a prisoner. He went to the window:

that, too, was barred. He suddenly began to realize that he was trapped.

It was nearly dusk when he heard footsteps outside the door, then the key turned and he looked up to see Claye standing in the doorway and Kilner behind him. And he saw something in their faces that turned his heart sick—deadly sick. His lips suddenly parched, tried to articulate.

"Get it over, Jim!" said Kilner, in a husky whisper.

Then young Mr. Bexendale saw the gleam of a revolver, and a cruel, steady eye behind it, and he felt as if all the world had suddenly gone to pieces about him, and he spun round and fell across the boards at his murderer's feet, shot through the brain.

CHAPTER VI

MR. KILNER PUTS HIS FRIEND IN A SAFE PLACE

Mr. Joseph Kilner, wiser in his generation than young Mr. Bexendale had thought him, had considered all the points of the problem which his patch-eyed visitor put to him with a celerity that would have amazed that unfortunate youth if he had only been able to see into the depths of the corpulent landlord's mind. He had had no previous notion of the existence of the diamonds, for Mr. Claye was one of those wise people who never talk about their own business needlessly, but when he did hear of them and that they were in his visitor's possession, he immediately confessed to himself that he would much rather go into partnership with Mr. Claye in them than with Mr. Bexendale. He had known Mr. Claye for some years and had already had various business dealings with him. Of young Mr. Bexendale he knew absolutely nothing beyond what that ingenuous person had told him, and he was not impressed by him in any way except that he was much more of a fool than he looked. Mr. Kilner's notions of a partner were of a man shrewd enough to keep himself safe; not of a youth who would run his head into the first booby-trap set for him. Moreover, at that particular period Mr. Kilner was hand in glove with Mr. Claye in more ways than one. It was Mr. Claye's money that had enabled Mr. Kilner to purchase the goodwill of the late Phelim Hanrahan's business. Mr. Kilner, moreover, did a little quiet book-making

in which Mr. Claye was also interested: and as Mr. Kilner invariably found in all these transactions that Mr. Claye was generous and open-handed he was scarcely likely to throw him over for a partner whose only bait was a promissory share in a diamond necklace which was in Mr. Claye's safe keeping. And so Mr. Kilner judged it his best policy to keep young Mr. Bexendale in custody until Mr. Claye returned to the shop, for he was sufficient judge of character to read malice in a human countenance when it was plainly written there, and he knew that if the young man with the patch on his eye got away he would certainly go to the police and bring a swarm of them about the house.

Mr. Kilner was by no means easy when he had locked his prisoner up with the whisky, the siphon, the cigars, and the newspaper. He got rid of his barman on a good excuse that sent that individual to the other side of Dublin for the rest of the day, and he settled himself in the front bar as a sort of watch-dog. He was horribly afraid that since young Bexendale was in collusion with the police, they must have kept a watch on him and been aware that he had entered his shop, and it would have occasioned him no surprise if he had received a visit from some individual who would turn out to be a detective. As the afternoon wore on and nothing but the ordinary customers turned up he grew less anxious, but he was very pleased and much relieved when Mr. Claye walked in about twilight. There was no one in the bar at the time, and Mr. Kilner followed his friend through the sanctum into the little private sitting-room in which he had held converse with young Mr. Bexendale earlier in the day. When he closed the door and looked round

at his guest, Mr. Claye knew that something had happened.

"I say, Jim," said Mr. Kilner, "I'm afraid you'll have to clear; they're on your track."

Mr. Claye started.

"What makes you say that, Joe," he asked. "Anybody been here?"

"I've got a chap locked up in a very private room upstairs at the back of the house," observed Mr. Kilner, "who would bring a swarm of 'em here if he could only get loose. Bexendale."

Mr. Claye started again at the name of his late partner.

"Bexendale," he said. "How came he here?"

"He came," answered Mr. Kilner, "in workman's clothes, with a patch over his eye. That was him as you passed in the bar as you went out."

"Him?" exclaimed Mr. Claye. "Who'd made him up, I wonder?"

"Ah," said Mr. Kilner. "He's better made up than you are, Jim—after all. Davidson made him up. You didn't know him, but he knew you. Look here."

Mr. Kilner made so bold as to take Mr. Claye's right hand in his own and to lift it up to its owner's gaze. He pointed to the finger which had lost its first joint, and to the tattooed mark near his wrist. "You should wear a glove, Jim," he said half reproachfully. "Marks like them tell, you know, they really do."

"I guess you're right," answered Mr. Claye. "Damned if I thought Bexendale was sharp enough to notice them. Well, what did he say or do?"

Mr. Kilner gave a brief, concise account of what had

transpired between himself and the young man upstairs, not forgetting to mention that young Mr. Bexendale had been generous enough to offer him, Mr. Kilner, some share in the hypothetical fortune of fifty thousand pounds.

"But I wasn't going to give you away, you know, Jim," concluded Mr. Kilner. "I always prefer an old pal to a new 'un. And so I just made the youngster safe until you came back."

"What's to be done?" said Mr. Claye. "If he gets out of here we'll have the police down on us in no time. And we can't keep him here—he'd kick up a row. I knew the Driscoll woman had started the game. I passed her and Davidson just now in Griffin Street, walking and talking together. She had a good stare at me, too,—didn't know me from Adam."

"It was your hand as done it with Bexendale, Jim," said Mr. Kilner. "The rest of you is perfection."

"Well," said Mr. Claye for the second time, "what's to be done?"

The two men looked at each other narrowly. For some moments neither of them spoke. At last Mr. Kilner broke the silence.

"Are they worth all that, Jim?" he said with great significance.

"Every penny of it," answered Mr. Claye, with equally great emphasis.

"Then they're worth running a bit of risk for?" said Mr. Kilner. "Have you got 'em on you, Jim, if one may ask?"

Mr. Claye felt that this question was equivalent to a declaration of intending partnership on the part of Mr. Kilner, and he replied to it somewhat testily.

"I've got 'em on me, Joe," he said, slapping the region of his liver lightly in indication of the fact that the treasure was stowed in his belt, "and you shall have your share of 'em if all goes right. But what about this chap upstairs—what's to be done with him?"

"It's his life or your liberty, Jim," said Mr. Kilner, in a low voice. "If he gets out of this he'll go straight to Davidson. If you were to get away yourself he'd eventually put them on your track."

Mr. Claye sighed.

"It's a job I've no liking for," he said. "But—is it a quiet room you've put him in?"

"Quiet as the grave," answered Mr. Kilner. "There's nobody can hear anything out of that room."

"Come on then,—let's get it over," said Mr. Claye. "Hadn't you better fasten your shop door for a while?"

Mr. Kilner went out and bolted the street door. Then he returned and led Mr. Claye up to his victim.

"It'll be all right there for awhile," said Mr. Kilner, regarding the dead body with an air of distaste. "I know where we can put him by and by—come down, Jim, and have a drink."

He locked the door on the dead man, and the two went back along the narrow corridors and dark staircase towards the inhabited part of the house. And as they descended the last flight of stairs they became aware of a heavy knocking on the street door. Mr. Claye and Mr. Kilner paused in their descent, and stared at each other with considerable surprise and agitation in their eyes.

"What's that," asked Mr. Claye suspiciously.

"Probably a customer," said Mr. Kilner. "Must be. Who else could it be?"

"Are you going to open the door?" inquired Mr. Claye.

"It'll look queer if I don't," said the new partner in the diamonds. "I'm supposed to be open until ten, and it isn't eight yet."

"Well, I'll be snug," remarked Mr. Claye. "Give the signal if anything seems wrong."

He disappeared into a room at the back and Mr. Kilner, not without considerable fear and trepidation, walked into the shop and opened the door. There stood a tall man in plain clothes, a man with a large moustache, and a pleasant smile—Sergeant Davidson.

"Good-evening, Mr. Kilner," he said affably enough. "It's rather a surprise to find you closed at this early hour."

"It's very unusual, sir, but I only closed for a few minutes," answered Mr. Kilner. "My man is away, and as I had to go to the back of the premises I just fastened the door for awhile. I'd had one slight robbery of the till this very afternoon," he continued with an aggrieved voice, "and I didn't want another."

"Ah, what was that?" inquired Davidson.

"This very afternoon," said Mr. Kilner, "in come a rather down-on-his-luck sort of chap as wore a patch over his eye and orders a bottle of ale. When I'd served him with the bottle of ale he asks if I couldn't get him a bit of bread and cheese, he was that hungry. Well, just to oblige him I stepped into the back of the house for the bread and cheese and when I came back my gentleman had departed and so had my money—what there was of it in the till, which," concluded Mr. Kilner with an air of resignation, "was certainly not much—two pounds four shillings and a few coppers, but still too much to lose."

"Ah," said Sergeant Davidson, who had listened to this story with great interest. "Now, it's rather singular, but I called to inquire about that very man, Mr. Kilner. One of my men had him under observation this afternoon and saw him enter your saloon—he waited some time for him to come out and he never came."

"I dare say," said Mr. Kilner dryly, "he wouldn't see him go out, 'cause he took himself off by this side door and there went down the alley. He done me with that trick," he continued with sarcastic reflection. "I ran out of the front door while he was most likely a-scooting down the alley. If Roberts was the man who had him under observation," he concluded, "I see Roberts a-standing on the other side of the street just before the man came in, but I didn't see him when I looked out after the thief or else I should have given information of my loss."

"It was Roberts," said the sergeant. He went over to the side door, opened it, and looked up the alley. "I don't think Roberts knew of this opening," he said, reflectively, as he came back into the shop.

"Very likely not, sir," replied Mr. Kilner, "it's not well seen from the street."

"I don't suppose you'll see the man again," said Davidson. "He'll keep clear of this quarter. But I shall be sure to get him and I'll see about getting your money back, if there's any of it left."

"Which I don't suppose there will be," said Mr. Kilner with a wry face. "But I'm obliged to you all the same, sir."

Sergeant Davidson went away and Mr. Kilner, after having locked the front door again, treated himself to a

drink, mixed another and carried it off to his friend Mr. Claye. And as he traversed the passages of the old house his mind continued to work at a plan which was slowly shaping itself there.

"Jim," he said as he rejoined his friend, "it was Davidson and after Bexendale. I've put him off for the time being, but he'll be back, Jim, for certain, and, Jim, we must get Bexendale out of the way, quick."

"And what about me?" inquired Mr. Claye, gulping down his whisky-and-soda at one draught. "Where am I to go?"

"I can put you where nobody but the devil himself could find you," replied Mr. Kilner, "if the need arises, Jim. But let's hope as how it won't."

They went upstairs together and they put the dead man into a large sack which Mr. Kilner unearthed from a cupboard on the way, and between them they carried him to the basement of the house by a back staircase and in one of the cellarings, green and noxious with damp, they laid him down and recovered their breath. And then Mr. Kilner pointed to a flagstone in the flooring in which was inserted a gigantic iron ring.

"Help me to get that up, Jim," he panted. "It's a lower cellaring that opens on an old sewer. There's nobody'll ever find him in there—and the rats'll clear his bones in a day or two—clothes or no clothes."

They got the flag up between them and in the light of a lantern which Mr. Kilner had carried disclosed a short, slippery flight of steps leading down into a dark space from which rose a whiff of pestilential air.

"Steady down, Jim," said Mr. Kilner. "Mind your feet."

Mr. Claye uttered an exclamation of disgust as they reached the bottom and set down their load.

"What a hole!" he said, "I wouldn't——"

"Hush!" said Mr. Kilner. "What's that! More knocking. Here, Jim, wait a second while I see what it is!"

He ran up the slippery steps with wonderful agility for one so corpulent, through the cellar above and along the basement passages towards the shop. Mr. Claye, listening in the loathsome cavern, heard his footsteps retreat, die away, and come into hearing again with great clatter and bustle down the steps into the cellar. Mr. Kilner reappeared frantic with haste.

"Jim, Jim!" he cried in a hoarse voice. "Down there with you quick! Here's Davidson and a whole gang of 'em!—hide down there till I can get 'em away—they'll not examine that hole."

Mr. Claye, who had advanced half-way up the steps of the noxious dungeon, retreated hastily and before he could say a word the heavy flagstone fell across the cavity and he found himself in darkness. He heard footsteps above him—Mr. Kilner's footsteps—and they seemed a long, long way off. Then came silence. He was alone with the body of his victim.

Mr. Kilner went slowly back to the shop, unlocked the street door, went behind the bar and mixed himself a stiff glass of brandy-and-water. He had carried out his plan, and the diamonds were his when the man who carried them had died of starvation.

EPISODE THE FIFTH

THE DIAMONDS GO BACK

CHAPTER I

THE MAN ABOVE AND THE MAN BELOW

For the rest of the evening Mr. Joseph Kilner remained in his saloon conducting his business as usual. Customers came in now and then, and he attended to their desires and held converse with some of them. None of them remarked anything strange in Mr. Kilner's manner—he passed the time of day in his usual affable fashion and talked of whatever subject happened to be to the fore at that moment. There were customers in the outer saloon and in the inner sanctum, and Mr. Kilner's man being away from the establishment, its proprietor had to attend to everybody himself. He was in and out of the two places constantly until closing time, and was never still until the last customer had gone. But when he finally closed the doors and secured the bolt and keys which held them, Mr. Kilner felt that at last the dreaded moment had come wherein he must face the lonely night, and the companionship of his own thoughts.

He naturally braced himself for this task by an application to the brandy decanter. He took a long and strong drink and felt much better for it, and he began to think of things in a pleasanter way. After all, the great thing he had most to fear was detection, and he saw little chance of that at present. Richard Claye, alias James Creighton, and some other names, was as much buried alive as if he had been formally interred in the deepest grave in Glass-

nevin cemetery—no one but Mr. Kilner could release him. And that Mr. Kilner was by no means disposed to do—the devils of cupidity, avarice, and of inordinate greed had taken hold of him; he meant the diamonds to be his. He would leave Mr. Claye in his prison-grave for awhile, and visit what was left of him later.

"And that," said Mr. Kilner reflectively, "can't be much, for those rats are something terrible. I wonder how long he'll last?—not long in that hole."

Then he partook of more brandy, and lighted a cigar and read the paper in his little sitting-room and wished the house was not so quiet.

"I'll get Hennessy to stop tomorrow night," he said to himself. "He'd be a bit of company at any rate—there's something very depressing in a house when there's nobody in it but yourself."

Then he remembered that there was something in his house beside himself, and that the something had been a living man who, in the very vigour of his manhood and flush of good health was suddenly condemned to death by starvation, and at this thought Mr. Kilner repaired to the brandy decanter for more comfort. He hoped that these sort of thoughts would not trouble him during the night, and as a precaution he determined to take more brandy to his bedroom.

When Mr. Kilner finally determined to retire he had already consumed about three times the amount of his usual allowance of spirits for the evening, and was steadily drinking still more, and he conceived and made welcome a delusion that the more brandy he drank the better it would be for him. He went to look round his house and once more told himself that he would really get some

person to live in it on the morrow—it was too lonely for anything.

"And yet," he said as he rolled his stout body about the passages and corridors, "who knows what mischief mightn't result? If it was a woman, now, she'd be peeping and prying from morning to night, and her nose would be poked into every corner of the place. And she might hear or see something."

The notion of what might be heard made him advance cautiously to the cellars and listen at the head of the stairway which led to them. Mr. Kilner could not hear anything there, so he crept softly downward, and at last, with a mighty effort of will-power, summoned up his courage and advanced to the ante-chamber of Mr. Claye's living tomb. He stood there for some time, quaking and shaking in the noisomeness of his cellar, and listened with all his ears. He heard nothing, and was not surprised. It would have been strange indeed if any sound could have penetrated the thickness of the solid floor of stone which shut out his victim from light, air, and liberty. The captive might shriek and sob for pity and for mercy as much as he pleased—no one would ever hear him.

It occurred to Mr. Kilner that while he was there he might make a few alterations in the cellar which seemed to be advisable, in case of a domiciliary visit from the police, so he set to work there and then to destroy any trace which might show that the trap into the vault had been opened, and to cover it over with chests, barrels and the like. It seemed to him that he was in a certain fashion trampling the earth upon Claye's grave while Claye still breathed in his coffin, but he got through his task and then hastily returned to the sitting-room, where he had

another long and strong drink. And after that Mr. Kilner went to bed, carrying the decanter of brandy with him.

It is needless to say that Mr. Kilner passed a very bad night. He had departed from his usual habits in several ways, and he naturally paid the penalty. To begin with, he had not only drank a great deal more than was good for him, but a great deal in excess of his usual allowance. Secondly, he had omitted to take his usual hearty supper, an omission which, in view of the large amount of liquor that he had consumed, was a fatal mistake. Thirdly, he had done things which, in a life largely composed of more or less wickedness and villainy on a small and rather a mean scale, he had never done and never dreamed of before. Thus he had assisted at a particularly cruel and cold-blooded murder, and had afterwards consigned the murderer to a living tomb wherein he was at that moment most likely half-crazed with terror and apprehension. Callous as Mr. Kilner was, these thoughts were by no means pleasant companions for the night. He tossed about in his bed; he tried burning a light at his bedside: he tried staring at the darkness: he tried walking about the room: he tried reading: and none of these things availed or comforted him. And needless to say, he tried the brandy decanter at periodic intervals, and for the first time in his life found that it did not console him in the usual way.

He fell into a feeble, troubled doze as it grew towards morning and was afflicted with dreams which were by no means pleasant. He had visions of a loathsome dungeon, cellar, or hole in the depths of the ground wherein vast swarms of particularly ferocious rats waited for the death of a living man, and meanwhile feasted upon the body of a dead one. He could see the eyes of these rats through

the blue-grey black atmosphere of the dungeon—they made little pin points of phosphorescent fire in the gloom and horror, and he fancied that there was something of human malice in the glare. Then the dreams changed and it was he himself who was a prisoner in the dungeon, and sometimes the rats ran over him to find out if he were still living, and he would shake them off with shrieks and curses, and after a time they would come softly back, and he knew that at last they would come for good, and at that thought his soul grew sick within him.

When he rose at an early hour, Mr. Kilner was a good deal of a wreck. He wandered miserably down stairs and after a time admitted the old woman who came every morning to light his fire, make his bed, and tidy up the room in which he lived. She was as deaf as a post and not very observant, and she did not notice anything very remarkable about Mr. Kilner's appearance, simply because she scarcely glanced at him. But when his man, Hennessy, turned up at seven o'clock he noticed a good deal, and asked Mr. Kilner if he was not well.

"I'm by no means well, Jim," replied Mr. Kilner very mournfully, and with a great note of sympathy for himself in his voice. "I've had a very poor night indeed—I thought I should have had to fetch the doctor—I really did. I'm afraid it's an old complaint of mine, Jim—an affection of the heart, it is, that gave me a deal of trouble some years ago."

"That's bad," said Mr. Hennessy, who was polishing the brass work of the counter, "ye might 'av a doctor this morning, sir."

"It's probably what I shall do, Jim, a little later on," replied Mr. Kilner. "Things like them must not be trifled

with, I know. I'm afraid, Jim, that the air of Dublin doesn't suit me—I've never felt what you might call well since I came to live in the town."

Mr. Hennessy replied that different climates suited different constitutions, and that he himself, glory be to God, considered Dublin the healthiest place in the world.

"Ah, you're a Dublin man, Jim," sighed Mr. Kilner. "It makes all the difference. One's native air is always good for one—I'm a Midlander myself, and I always did feel that the air of the Midlands is the most sal—what do they call it—salubrious? I think it is, in the whole world. There's a sweetness and softness about that air, Jim, that I never feel nowhere else," concluded Mr. Kilner, whom much brandy had brought to the verge of tears. "I wish I could smell it just now—I do indeed."

"Ye should take a little bit of a holiday that way, sir," said Mr. Hennessy, "it'd do ye a power of good."

"I shouldn't wonder if your advice was good, Jim," replied Mr. Kilner. "I'll think it over and see what can be done. It's very foolish indeed, I know, to trifle with affairs of the heart."

In point of fact, Mr. Kilner had been meditating some such holiday as that recommended by his assistant for at least sixteen hours, and was wondering how it could be carried into effect. It was his intention to get away from Dublin as quickly as he possibly could—always providing that it could be done without exciting any suspicion. And he meant to set about the getting away that morning.

One or two hairs of the dog that had not bitten him quite so badly as he could have wished it to, a breakfast on strong tea, dry toast, and salt fish returned Mr. Kilner to a state of something like renewed health and confi-

dence, and about ten o'clock he intimated to Mr. Hennessy that he was going forth to see a doctor, and left his barman in sole charge of the establishment. But Mr. Kilner's mind was changed on reaching the street—instead of seeking medical advice he sought the agent from whom he had bought the good-will and stock of the late Mr. Phelim Hanrahan's business and was presently quartered on that gentleman in private.

"I've called to see you," said Mr. Kilner, "on a matter of business. I want you to sell that there business of mine —that as was Hanrahan's—as soon as you can—I've had enough of it."

The agent stared.

"Why," said he, "it's only been yours ten months—or is it eleven? You've soon tired of it, Mr. Kilner—surely you didn't find that it wasn't what it was represented to be?"

Mr. Kilner waved his fat hands.

"I've no complaint on that score," he said. "The business is well enough, and the receipts are better, as the books will show, than when I took it over. It's my health, sir—there's no doubt as Dublin doesn't suit me. A fine city, and nice people, as I, a stranger, can testify, but not good for my health. I suffer from a particular affection of the heart, and it's got gradually worse. If I don't mean to lay my bones——"

Mr. Kilner paused, suddenly faint and ghastly pale. He was thinking of the men whose bones were doomed to repose in something less pleasant than a Dublin cemetery. His countenance grew sea-green, and he half choked.

The agent rose from his chair, much alarmed.

"Are you ill?" he asked. "Shall I get anything?"

Mr. Kilner shook his head. He swallowed once or twice, and got his breath and his self-confidence again.

"No, thanking you," he said. "It's passed now. It's sudden spasms of the heart, like that, sir, what's a troubling of me. Dublin, sir, isn't suited to my health, so, as I was saying, I want you to find a purchaser for my business—for strict cash—as early as you can."

Then he went away, and returned to Mr. Hennessy and the establishment, and he duly informed that gentleman that by medical advice he had come to the extremely painful conclusion that he must sell his business and return to England, where, in his native country and air, he hoped to regain his normal state of health.

During the next fortnight Mr. Kilner made a change in his mode of life. After closing hours every evening, instead of remaining alone in the house, he locked it up and spent the night at a small hotel, a little distance away. There he was known as an affable and quiet person who drank a glass or two before retiring to his room, who was not very well in health, and ate very modestly of breakfast, and who gave scarcely any trouble. He always carried a small handbag with him to the hotel and took it away in the morning, and the hotel people were not aware that it contained a full bottle of brandy at night and an empty one in the morning—Mr. Kilner's ablutions were carried on in his own room while virtuous folk slept.

In point of fact Mr. Kilner was in a state of abject terror, not of being found out in his misdeeds, but of paying the visit to Claye's tomb which was absolutely necessary if he meant to secure the diamonds. He had no doubt of what he would find there, or that the diamonds would reward him, but he was something of a squeamish stom-

ached man and did not care for disagreeable sights. And so he put the visit off until all the arrangements for the sale of the business had been completed, and in fact until the very evening before his intended departure for England, and when he at length got the house to himself he had to fortify his spirits with an extra large dose of brandy before he could bring himself to set out upon his mission. He pulled himself together at last and set to work upon the task before him. Horrors or double horrors, he must have the diamonds for which he had bartered his soul.

When he went to the little hotel that evening Mr. Kilner carried the diamonds with him in his bag alongside the provision for his night's debauch. But on that night one flask of brandy satisfied him—he slept as soundly as an innocent child, for his mind was at last at rest.

CHAPTER II

A COTTAGE IN ARCADIA

Mr. Kilner left Dublin without difficulty and under nobody's suspicion or observation. It was quite true that Sergeant Davidson had failed to hear any news of young Mr. Bexendale, that Richard Claye semed to have completely disappeared, and that Miss Driscoll's diamonds had vanished with him, but all these things were in no way connected with Mr. Kilner. It so happened that some account—not a very clear nor a very definite one—had crept into the papers and had been mentioned by Sergeant Davidson to Mr. Kilner in the course of a casual conversation in the street wherein the sergeant had remarked that young Mr. Bexendale had evidently profited by the contents of Mr. Kilner's till to make himself safe, but nothing had connected Mr. Kilner with the mystery. It was his misfortune, not his fault, that young Mr. Bexendale had robbed him. To Sergeant Davidson Mr. Kilner intimated and bewailed the fact that he was leaving Dublin on account of his health, and he spoke so pathetically of his sad fate in being obliged to relinquish a business which was just beginning to increase its takings in a very substantial fashion that the sergeant was sorry for him and said so.

"But why don't you just take a good holiday somewhere and come back when you're quite set up?" suggested Sergeant Davidson. "Maybe you're only just in need of a change."

"No, sir," replied Mr. Kilner, shaking his head with portentous solemnity. "That, I'm afraid, wouldn't do. The air and climate of Dublin, sir, don't suit me. I must have something more salubrious."

Then he remarked that if Sergeant Davidson ever caught that young scamp who had robbed him, Mr. Kilner, of the contents of the till he hoped he would make an example of him, and shook hands with great cordiality and went his way. So there was no suspicion attached to Mr. Joseph Kilner when he left the Irish capital, and no fear in his own mind of a detective awaiting him when he stepped ashore from the mail steamer at Holyhead.

Mr. Kilner felt glad to know that he was a free man and a man who had done so well in business that he could enjoy a holiday. He had made a nice bit of money one way and another, he said to himself: there had been the purchase price of the business, which amounted to a few thousands of pounds, and then the diamonds, concerning the disposal of which he had distinctly good and business-like ideas. There was no reason why he should not now settle down and enjoy life—the sort of life that appealed to him. He knew exactly what sort of life that was, and he determined to live it.

He went to Llandudno from Holyhead, and putting himself up at the best hotel in the place, recruited his wearied and shattered nerves for several weeks. He broke himself of inordinate drinking habits, and gradually brought his allowance down to a reasonable amount of whisky-and-soda at meals and three glasses of hot grog at night. He kept regular hours and slept very well; he spent most of his time in the open air: at the end of a month he was a new man: at the end of six weeks a healthy and

cheerful one. He had drowned recollection in a large vat of alcohol, and had subsequently flung the vat with all its contents into the abyss of oblivion. Mr. Kilner, in fact, had achieved that extraordinry mental feat which enables men to believe in things which never existed, or to find it impossible to believe in things which they themselves actually committed. If he ever found a stray thought of Dublin and its tragedy enter his mind, he dismissed it without ceremony, and with a sigh of reget that even the best-intended and mildest-mannered of us are sometimes obliged to do unpleasant things.

Mr. Kilner, at the end of his seaside holiday, decided to begin the process of settling down. He had two passions, one for gardening and the other for fishing, and he wanted to combine the indulgence of them with life in a pleasant country. He liked North Wales, and he began to make some inquiries as to what he could find there that would suit him. And talking one night in the smoking-room with a gentleman who appeared to know what he was talking about, Mr. Kilner received advice upon which he decided to act.

"If I were you," said his adviser, "and wanted just what you seem to want, I should certainly try the neighbourhood of the Vale of Clwyd. You can get splendid fishing on the Clwyd and the Elwy, and the country is delightful. I should imagine you could get an excellent bachelor house there. Why not take a trip in that direction and see the place yourself. Drop over to Denbigh—fine, interesting town—stay at the 'Bull,' and look round you."

Mr. Kilner decided to act upon this advice at once, so he set out next day for Denbigh and was duly installed

at the "Bull" by night-fall. He made some inquiries in the smoking-room that night which convinced him that the fishing in the neighbourhood was all that could be desired: he had seen enough of the Vale of Clwyd on his way between Rhyl and Denbigh to satisfy even his taste for natural beauty. A fertile valley, walled in by the blue mountains on each side save one, where it dipped gently to the sea: river, wood and lovely scenery in the richest profusion: what more could mortal man desire? With a fishing rod; a comfortable house; a good garden; a good table; good liquor and good cigars, Mr. Kilner would be as comfortable as man need be. He looked into the future when he sought his bed that night, and he prophesied many pleasant things for himself.

Next morning Mr. Kilner sought a house-agent and solemnly introduced himself and his business.

"My name, sir," said he, "is James Keene—late of London—retired merchant. I'm wanting to find a good substantial house in these parts, suitable for a bachelor and two women servants. It must be conveniently situated and possess a good garden, it must also be detached, and the drains and sanitary arrangements, sir, must be in good condition. In the case of a house, sir, that fulfils my requirements, the question of rent, sir," concluded Mr. Keene, grandiloquently, "will be treated as a matter of small consideration."

To a house-agent who usually found that incoming tenants wanted all they could get for as little as possible, such a gentleman as Mr. Keene was a godsend, and he set to work to serve him with very great zeal. And so well did he work that within a month his client was established in a house on the banks of the Clwyd, a mile or two from

Denbigh, and was surrounding himself with adjuncts which he hoped to enjoy to a green old age.

Mr. Keene's (it is useless to call him Mr. Kilner now that he had discarded the name) house was a comfortable stone dwelling, standing in a delightful piece of ground, some of which was given up to ornamental garden, some to kitchen and fruit gardens, and some to smooth expanses of lawn, which were overshadowed by noble groves of elm and ash, plane trees and yew. It was not a large house, but quite large enough for its owner, and for the cook-housekeeper and smart housemaid whom Mr. Keene duly installed in it. Perhaps the garden was rather larger and more expensive to keep up than its new tenant had meant it to be; but Mr. Keene was evidently a well-to-do man and could afford the services of a gardener. These he promptly secured, and from that time forward the wheels of the establishment, which was known in the district as Aboukir Lodge, moved with easy precision.

Mr. Keene became a well-known figure in the neighbourhood. It was speedily known that he had opened an account at a local bank; that he had furnished his house from basement to attic at a local shop, and had paid cash for a heavy bill—it was further known that all the tradesmen's accounts were settled every Saturday morning, and that the household was run on generous but not extravagant lines. That the new tenant of Aboukir Lodge was possessed of ample means was evident: who or what he was, or had been, nobody knew. As there were no ladies in his establishment, no ladies called upon him: such of their husbands as met in the town remarked of the new-comer that he was a plain, homely sort of person, uneducated, but certainly shrewd. He amused himself entirely with

fishing and gardening; he also, according to the news-agent, read a great many newspapers from various parts of the country, but he kept himself pretty much to himself. His servants never talked of him, and nobody knew more of him than he wished them to know.

There was one person, however, who, during the first two years of Mr. Keene's residence in this secluded spot, knew a good deal about his money matters. When he came to the town, Mr. Keene opened an account at a bank and deposited about five thousand pounds in cash; after he had settled down, a good deal of this was invested in a certain gilt-edged security, the dividends from which were in time duly credited to Mr. Keene. From time to time Mr. Keene appeared at the bank and paid into his account sums varying from three hundred to a thousand pounds. As his capital increased in this way, it was invested in other gilt-edged securities, the dividends from which also appeared. At the end of two years the manager of the bank could have told you that of his own knowledge he knew that Mr. Keene had over twenty thousand pounds invested in first-class railway stock: that he had at that moment a sum of about three thousand pounds lying to the credit of his account at the bank, and that the cash payments, alluded to above, were still coming steadily in. Every few weeks they came—always in the shape of brand-new Bank of England notes—always paid in, in person, by Mr. Keene himself. A nice, warm, well-to-do man, this Mr. Keene; and full of quiet respectability; a man of benefactions, too, although not lavish or extravagant in his charity; a man of good life, also, for he attended Divine Service every Sunday regularly, and there was some talk of making him a churchwarden.

At the end of two years, then, Mr. Keene had achieved a reputation in the land of his adoption. He had plenty of money: he was well-conducted, if not well-educated; a gentle man, if not a gentleman; he went to church, and never refused money to the charities; his pursuits and occupations were of a peaceful nature: first and last, he paid his way, and the people who were at all concerned about him knew that he was well-to-do. He had arrived at that topmost pinnacle of fame—he had plenty of money. Had he been a genius and poor, nobody would have cared a twopenny damn about him; having much money, the butcher, and the fishmonger, to say nothing of the wine-merchant and tobacconist, raised a finger of respectful adoration to their hats and caps when they encountered him.

It was about this time that Mr. Keene was recognized by an old acquaintance. The old acquaintance could not, by any stretch of imagination, be called an old friend: in sober truth he was a member of the police force, who had known Mr. Keene in the days when he ran the oyster saloon in Leeds, and was distinguished by the name of Joseph or Joe Kilner. At that time the old acquaintance was a detective, holding high rank in the Leeds police; he was now enjoying a position of higher rank in Liverpool. Like Mr. Keene, he was very fond of fishing, and it was this fondness that sent him one fine Spring day into the Vale of Clwyd, there to spend a fortnight's holiday on the banks of the Clwyd and the Elwy. And just to prove that the world is a small one, and that one never knows what is going to happen next, it was all through this innocent desire for recreation that Inspector Nicholson happened to meet this man whom he had known as Joe Kilner.

The two men met in the High Street of Denbigh one afternoon when Mr. Keene was walking through it in all the dignity of black broadcloth. He had been to make a formal call on the clergyman in whose parish there was some talk of making him a churchwarden, and had donned his Sunday garments as being most fitting to the occasion. He looked very solemn and very stately, and Inspector Nicholson, who was talking to a tradesman in a friendly fashion at the door of the latter's shop, was considerably startled as he recognized in this apparition the man who had often opened a dozen oysters for him in the little green-painted saloon at Leeds, and whom he knew to have been mixed up with a queer lot in that city. But he had no more doubt of the man's identity than of his own, and he stopped him boldly.

"Why, Joe!" said he, "whatever brings you here, and in sober black? Have you turned parson since you left the oyster trade?"

Mr. Keene drew himself up in indignant astonishment. His broad face purpled with annoyance; his voice had a ring of righteous anger.

"You are making some mistake, sir," said he, eyeing the stranger over as if he did not know him from Adam. "A strange mistake, indeed, sir."

Inspector Nicholson could have bitten his tongue out. He knew that he had made a mistake—though not the mistake the man was accusing him of. He could have kicked himself for his hasty impulse.

"I beg your pardon, most humbly, sir!" he said, stepping back, and lifting his hat. "I see now that I have made a mistake. Pray forgive me—I certainly took you for an old friend of mine, whom I haven't seen for some

years. There is, I assure you, a most extraordinary likeness between you."

"I have heard, sir," remarked Mr. Keene, "that the King himself has a double. I wish you a good-day, sir," and he walked on in greater state, and with added solemnity.

The tradesman to whom the Inspector had been talking laughed as the latter rejoined him.

"That's Mr. Keene," said he. "Fancy hailing him as 'Joe'!"

"And who is Mr. Keene?" inquired the Inspector.

The tradesman, glad of airing his knowledge, reeled off all he knew respecting Mr. Keene and his connection with the neighbourhood.

"Decent old chap," he concluded. "A bit pompous, and so on, but very quiet-mannered and leads a peaceful life. And he's got—oh!—piles of money."

Inspector Nicholson said nothing, but he took occasion to visit the local police station, and there he saw the chief, and had a quiet talk about the incident just related, and about the pseudo Mr. Keene, and he stuck to his point like a leech.

"There's no doubt about it," he concluded. "I will stake my professional reputation that that man is the man Joe Kilner, who kept an oyster saloon in Leeds, and was the associate of a queer lot there, and notably of a swell mobsman who had all sorts of irons in the fire, and was known by various aliases—James Creighton and Richard Claye amongst them. He'd no money in those days—where has it come from?"

"You're sure you're not mistaken?" asked the other dubiously.

"Certain," replied Inspector Nicholson with great emphasis. "I'd have known him anywhere by his face, his walk, his hands. It may be all right—but I give you a tip —keep your eyes on Mr. John Keene.

CHAPTER III

NEWS FROM DUBLIN

Inspector Nicholson, as it has already been remarked of him, was a police official who now enjoyed high rank in the Liverpool force, which is equivalent to saying that there had always been in him a desire to rise in the service and that he had managed to achieve his success. But he was one of those men whose ambition is boundless, and who lose no opportunity of pushing themselves on in their profession; he was, moreover, a man who, having had his curiosity aroused, did not like to have it baulked. Further, although he was at that time on a holiday, he saw no reason why he should not combine a little business with his pleasure. So that night he sat down after supper in the coffee-room of his hotel and wrote a very private letter to an old friend of his in Leeds, like himself, a prominent member of the service, and without taking him very much into his confidence, he asked him if he could tell him what had become of Joe, or Joseph Kilner, who had been known to both of them a few years previously. It might be merely idle curiosity, he said to himself, when he had strolled across to the post-office and posted his letter, that made him do this, but one could never tell what even the smallest things led to.

If Inspector Nicholson could have looked into Mr. Keene's highly respectable dining-room that evening he would have found that gentleman in a state of great and even serious discomposure. Mr. Keene had recognized

the man who had accosted him, and the recognition was causing him the most severe mental anguish. He dreaded a policeman as a saint dreads sin; the sight of an innocent, unoffending rustic constable at a cross-road made him sweat; but the presence of a real live actual detective in plain clothes caused him absolute pain, physical as well as mental. He had continued to keep his countenance and his dignity when Inspector Nicholson addressed him, but it had only been at tremendous cost to himself, and he had been so faint after passing on that he had been obliged against the principles which he had recently formulated and adopted, to go into an hotel and ask for an old brandy. And as he sipped it in the privacy of the coffee-room he asked himself again and again—Did it mean anything? Had Nicholson found anything out? Was he—dreadful thought—was he on the track? This notion so affrighted him that he had to ring for another dose of brandy, and he remarked to the landlord that he was suffering from an old heart complaint.

The second stimulant cheered Mr. Keene up a little. He reflected that if Nicholson had wanted him he would not have let him go out of his sight. But how did he know that he was out of his sight—he might be keeping him under observation? He got up and stealthily opening the door peeped out into the hall, half-expectant of finding Nicholson and a force of police there. The hall was empty save for the presence of a sleepy boots who was trying to understand the mysteries of Ruff's Guide to the Turf. Mr. Keene closed the door gently and looked out of the window, fearing to see Nicholson pacing the street on the opposite side. But there was no Nicholson there; it was, obvious, then, that Nicholson was not after him at present.

At present! These words beat themselves upon Mr. Keene's mental conscience with sickening force as he walked homewards to his comfortable house. What was the use of present safety if the future was to be harassed by doubts? He had hoped that he had escaped from the world; from the time of his arrival in North Wales until that moment he had never set eyes on a person of his previous acquaintance, and he had hoped that he never would. He tried to cheer himself up during his dinner—which he invariably took at six o'clock of the evening as being a highly respectable and pleasurable sort of time—by trying to convince himself that the meeting was merely accidental. If Nicholson had been anything but what he was Mr. Keene would not have cared so much, but the mere fact that he was a detective and uncommonly well known in police circles by the skill which he displayed in unravelling certain mysteries of crime, made Mr. Keene as frightened as a child is of a wasp.

That night Mr. Keene was unhappy; next day miserable; on the third day he contrived to find that Nicholson had left the town, and his buoyancy and good spirits returned to him fourfold. It had, then, been nothing but an accidental meeting. He dismissed the unfortunate matter from his memory and resumed his pleasant, peaceful life.

Inspector Nicholson, it was true, had left the town; but it was on Mr. Keene's business. He had received a letter from Leeds that morning in reply to his own, and it had first set him thinking a good deal, and had then made him resolve to spend the remainder of his holiday in fishing for the solution of a mystery rather than for trout in the Welsh rivers. He looked up trains and steam-

ers, he packed his bag, and long before noon was on his way to Holyhead and Dublin. And on the way he read his old friend's letter several times and tried to see through all that it presented to him. It was not a long letter, yet it was full of suggestions to a man like Inspector Nicholson, who saw significances where most people would have seen none. The Inspector's friend said that the man Joseph or Joe Kilner had left Leeds rather more than three years previously, and that it was understood that he had gone to Dublin, where he had set up as a publican. The friend further remarked that he had never heard anything of him since, and that he might still be in Dublin. Then followed the passage which Inspector Nicholson found invested with much interest and significance.

"I have some faint recollection," wrote the Inspector's correspondent, "that this man Kilner was in some way connected with (or, rather, that his name was mentioned in connection with it) a Dublin mystery, which so far as I know has never been unravelled. You may remember something of it—an Irish lady, Miss Driscoll, travelled from Castleford to Limerick, and was robbed in Dublin by two men who turned out to be from Yorkshire—one Ninian Bexendale, from Castleford, the other a Leeds man who was well-known to the police under the name of Richard Claye and James Creighton. These two men disappeared almost immediately after the robbery—which was of diamonds, the exact value of which, for some reason, was never made public—and they have never been heard of since. I have some recollection, speaking from memory, that Bexendale was last seen in the neighbourhood of this man Kilner's bar, or saloon—I am certain

Kilner's name was mentioned, because I immediately recognized it as that of the man from Leeds who had kept the oyster saloon. Kilner was not at all implicated in this affair, so far as I know. But I have learned something since your letter reached me this morning—Kilner was a great friend of Claye's or Creighton's and had at one time been in his employ as keeper of a tobacconist's shop in Bradford, where a good deal of betting business was going on. I don't know whether this was known to the Dublin police at the time—I wonder if there was any business being done at the time of the Driscoll robbery between Claye and Kilner? It seems not unlikely, when you come to consider matters. As for Claye, he has never been heard of since the Dublin affair, and it has always been supposed that he and Bexendale made their escape to the Continent by the South of Ireland."

Inspector Nicholson read this communication over and over again before he reached Dublin at six o'clock that evening. He cut no time to waste on arrival, but immediately set to work to find the man who had charge of the Driscoll robbery, and before seven he was closeted with Davidson—now, like himself, an Inspector—in the latter's room.

"I wanted to talk to you," he said, "about one or two matters in which you were concerned two and a half years ago. Do you remember an Englishman named Joseph Kilner, who managed, or was proprietor, of a saloon or drinking bar here in Dublin?"

"Oh, very well," answered Davidson. "I knew him quite well. He bought the goodwill and stock-in-trade of a business once owned by a man named Phelim Hanrahan in

Lower Abbey Street, and ran it for some nine or ten months. Oh, yes, I remember Kilner—a big, heavy, rather unwieldly man who was obliged to give up the business because of some heart trouble. I had a chat with him just before he left Dublin. Yes—what of Kilner?"

"He is living as an affluent retired London merchant in very good, quiet style at Denbigh, in North Wales," replied Nicholson "But he is Joseph Kilner no longer—he has been known ever since he went there as John Keene."

Davidson's face showed a new interest.

"Well?" he said.

"'You were concerned in the Driscoll case?" said Nicholson. "A case in which two men named Claye and Bexendale made a lift of diamonds at a Dublin hotel and disappeared successfully."

Davidson made a wry face.

"Yes," he said. "I tried a new plan there and failed ignominously," and he gave his vistior a brief account of what had happened. "There were strange circumstances about that case," he said meditatively. "Miss Driscoll could not be got to account for her possession of the diamonds, or, rather, for their possession by the man who had left them to her, and she would not agree to more publicity about them than was contained in the announcement that a diamond necklace had been stolen. As a matter of fact, she alleged to me that the diamonds were worth fifty thousand pounds."

Inspector Nicholson uttered a curious clicking sound with his tongue.

"Ay," he said. "I thought so. That's it!—Kilner's got the diamonds."

Inspector Davidson started in his chair. He looked at his visitor from England as if he could scarcely believe his eyes or his ears.

"What?" he almost shouted. "Kilner! Why—what do you mean?"

"You said that from the time Bexendale, in his disguise, was seen to enter Kilner's saloon he was never seen again," said Nicholson.

"Yes, that is so—he never was seen again," replied Davidson.

"No, and I'll tell you why," said Nicholson, nodding his head. "You didn't know, and nobody knew—here, at any rate—that Kilner was an old friend of Claye's and had been in his employ in Yorkshire. Claye, while you were looking for him, would be hiding at Kilner's."

Davidson leapt to his feet with a sharp exclamation.

"Ah," he said, "if I had only known. But Kilner was a perfectly respectable tradesman—there was nothing against him and no reason to suspect him. He was also a most plausible liar—I fully believed his explanation about Bexendale's robbery of the till, and flight by the side door—it was so much what a sneak thief would do. Good heavens, and they were all three together! And to think——?"

"I think," answered Nicholson slowly, "that one might put it in this way. Kilner comes across here, a poor man, as I can prove he was when he left Leeds. He clears out of Dublin some few months later and within a very few weeks he is found living in wealth in North Wales, and giving indisputable proof that he is a man of means. Where did he get the money? Now about the time of his disappearance from Dublin fifty thousand pounds worth

of diamonds disappear. I tell you straight out—my theory is that these diamonds within a few days of the robbery at the hotel passed into the entire possession of Joseph Kilner, and that he is now living on the proceeds."

Davidson nodded his head in silence. He walked up and down the room for a moment or two without speaking. Then he looked at his visitor.

"There was something else disappeared besides the diamonds," he said in a low voice. "There were the two men."

"Ay," said Nicholson. "And the probability is—two lives."

"What would you suggest?" asked Davidson.

"I think," replied Nicholson, "I should like to examine that house in Lower Abbey Street."

Davidson turned in his hurried walk up and down the room and regarded him with a critical expression.

"It's your opinion," he said, "at least, I take it to be so, that Kilner murdered those two."

"Pretty much about that," answered Nicholson.

"Well," said Davidson, "it's not mine. I'll tell you what I think: I think that Claye murdered Bexendale, or that Claye and Kilner managed it between them and got rid of the body, and that Kilner murdered Claye later on. I've been trying to bring something to mind and now I remember it. The night I called there to make inquiries about Bexendale I found the place closed—somewhere about eight o'clock that was, and it was, of course, an uncommon thing. Kilner opened the door to me at last and said that his man had been sent out on an errand and that he himself had been engaged at the rear of the house and so he had locked the door for a few minutes. If we

shall ever find out the whole truth I reckon we shall know that it was at that time Claye got his quietus."

"I still think," said Nicholson quietly, "that I should like to examine that house—and as soon as possible."

"Oh," said Davidson, "we'll do it. It's the first thing to be done." He looked at his watch. "What do you say," he continued, "if it's done late tonight? The same man has it that's been there ever since Kilner sold it—he's a thoroughly honest, respectable man, and I'll explain the thing thoroughly to him this evening and arrange to go there after closing time so as not to excite the attention of his customers. If in the meanwhile you'd like to take your supper and rest a bit I'll meet you here at eleven o'clock."

To these proposals Inspector Nicholson was nothing loath, and he presently sought out a quiet hotel which he knew of old, and had supper there, and all the time he was eating and drinking he was wondering if that chance meeting with Kilner in Denbigh had frightened his man into a sudden flight. He hoped it had not—he thought it had not—but he knew how easily the guilty are made afraid.

If Nicholson had but known it, Mr. Keene or Mr. Kilner had by that time dismissed all fear. The detective had gone away from the district and he could breathe. He was very much contented with himself that night and while Nicholson was supping in Dublin he was amusing himself with whisky and cigars at Aboukir Lodge and caring for nothing or nobody. He slept very well indeed that night, and whistled as he went down to breakfast next morning. But as he reached his entrance hall the housemaid was opening the front door, and Mr. Keene found himself

confronted by three men, in one of whom he recognized the Chief Constable.

Within an hour and a half the townsfolk knew that in consequence of a telegram received first thing that morning the respectable Mr. Keene had been arrested on a charge of murder, and that the detectives were on their way from Ireland to convey him to the scene of his misdeeds.

CHAPTER IV

MR. KILNER DELIVERS HIS CONSCIENCE

It is not seldom the case that a man who deludes himself into a belief that he is suffering from some particular disease induces that disease by sheer effort of will and suffers at last in reality what he has previously suffered in imagination. Mr. Kilner had for so many years informed all and sundry that he suffered from an affection of the heart that that organ really began to be affected, with the result that such a great shock as that which was communicated to it as his arrest in the hall of his own house had the effect of almost entirely stopping its action. In point of fact, Mr. Kilner no sooner heard the fatal news than he collapsed in a heap at the foot of the staircase, and the police, instead of carrying him off in the cab, as they had meant to, were obliged to use the cab, which waited, all in readiness, at the garden entrance for the purpose of fetching the nearest doctor. It was evident to the most inexperienced eye that Mr. Kilner, as he lay breathing heavily in his hall, where glass cases, filled with pike and trout of abnormal size, and pictures of the chase, bore witness to his love of sport, that he was much more likely to take his last journey of all than to be conveyed to Dublin.

When the doctor came he applied himself to bringing Mr. Kilner to a state of consciousness, and in order that he might not go off again from sheer fright at the presence of the police, he caused them to hide themselves behind

a screen. It was a sorely afflicted Mr. Kilner who opened fish-like eyes on the doctor, and one who did not quite realize his position.

"I'm afraid I've had a stroke, doctor," said Mr. Kilner feebly.

"No, no, your heart is a little affected, my dear sir," replied the doctor. "A little weak, you know, not equal to sudden shocks."

"I always did suffer from a weakness of the heart," said Mr. Kilner. "And I've had a deal to try me." Here he began to remember things and to shed a few tears, especially on beholding his housekeeper. "Oh dear," he said, "to think of such a wicked charge as that being brought against me—me as the Vicar has invited to be a churchwarden. It's scandalous!"

"None of us are free from the breath of scandal," said the doctor soothingly. "It's a blessing to be able to disprove the accusations which the wicked bring against us. Now, my dear sir, we must have you to bed."

"Then I'm not to be took to prison?" said the patient, with a gleam of hope evident in his troubled eyes.

"Certainly not, sir; you're to be taken to bed," answered the doctor. "No prison for you. I couldn't think of it."

He got his patient to bed and ministered to him again, and after a time he went downstairs to the police who were waiting him in the dining-room.

"What's all this?" asked the doctor, who was not yet in full knowledge of the position. "You can't remove him at present, you know, or I doubt if you ever can. Couldn't you have broken the news more gently?—you've nearly killed him. What's the charge against him?"

"Murder, sir," answered the chief laconically. "Two murders."

The doctor whistled.

"Whew—w—w!" His eyebrows elevated themselves. "The highly respectable Mr. Keene, who has been asked to be a churchwarden. Good gracious, is it possible. Do you think there's any truth in it?"

"I can't say, sir. My instructions are by telegram from Dublin. Inspector Nicholson of the Liverpool police, and Inspector Davidson of the Dublin force, are travelling over by the day mail to take him in charge," said the chief. "They'll be here during the afternoon. Do I understand that he can't be moved without danger to his life?"

"Oh, certainly, you must understand it," answered the doctor. "If you attempt to move him to the police station he'll die on the way. You'll have to exercise great caution when the detectives arrive—the least shock will finish him."

Then the doctor went away, saying that he would call again later on and promising to send a nurse, and all that could be done by the police was to leave one of their number in surveillance of the sick man, which feat was accomplished by installing him in an easy chair at the door of Mr. Kilner's room.

When the two Inspectors arrived during the course of the day they were met by the Chief Constable and informed of the state of affairs. The three repaired to Aboukir Lodge and had an interview with the doctor, who informed them that he was somewhat better and was now fully aware of the charge that had been brought against him, and that it was quite impossible to move him at pres-

ent. He had been informed that Inspector Davidson was coming over from Dublin to take him in charge for removal to Ireland, and he had expressed a wish to see that officer on his arrival.

"I fancy," said the doctor, "that he wants to extract some information from you. He's a sly old dog—but there's no shamming about his heart. I wouldn't give twopence for his chance of life—if he's guilty he'll never see the scaffold."

Then he offered to take Sergeant Davidson upstairs, and at the door of the sick room, warned him once more against giving the sick man any sudden shock.

"Now then, Mr. Keene," he said, leading Davidson into the room, "here's the gentleman you wished to see—come to have a quiet little talk with you."

Mr. Kilner lay slightly propped up in bed—it was plain to the Inspector that his prisoner was very ill indeed, and he could not help feeling very sorry for him. He went up to the bedside with a soft footstep and a sympathetic voice.

"Well, Mr. Kilner," he said, "I'm very sorry to find you like this."

Mr. Kilner's large countenance betrayed traces of emotion.

"I never thought, Mr. Davidson, that you and me, as was such friends in Dublin, would meet under such circumstances, as this," he replied, in a woe-begone voice. "It's a cruel, hard world, is this. I hope as you've had naught to do with the charge agen me, Mr. Davidson?"

The doctor had left the room, the Inspector took a chair at the bedside. "I'm very sorry to have been obliged

to have to do with it, Mr. Kilner," he said, "but duty, you know, is duty. If you're an innocent man, all you've got to do is to clear yourself of the charge."

"Innocents is often accused falsely, Mr. Davidson," remarked the sick man. "It's none so easy, as you know, to answer charges like that. Fancy charging an honest, respectable man like me, as was to be a churchwarden, with the crime of murder. It's scandalous."

"Well, Mr. Kilner," answered Davidson, "if you feel and know yourself to be innocent, you must refute the charge—that's all."

Mr. Kilner's fingers plucked nervously at the coverlet of his ample bed. He looked at his visitor out of his eye corners.

"I would like to know," he said, "what the charge agen me is, Mr. Davidson. What it is that's set up to my discredit?"

"The charge, Mr. Kilner, is that you murdered the two men, Ninian Bexendale and James Creighton, alias Richard Claye, at your house in Lower Abbey Street, in Dublin," replied Davidson, "and that you by that means became possessed of the diamond necklace which they had stolen from Miss Driscoll."

"Hark at that now," exclaimed Mr. Kilner. "Everybody, you included, Mr. Davidson, knows that I left Dublin because of this affection of the heart, and with as good and honest a character as could be given to any man. What should I have to do with thieves and such riff-raff?"

"Mr. Kilner," said Davidson, "the bodies of these two men, or, rather, their skeletons, were found in the cellar

of the house last night—I saw them myself. They had both been shot through the head."

Mr. Kilner betrayed no confusion. He had been prepared for this.

"I don't see what that matters, Mr. Davidson," he answered after a brief period of thought. "All that might have happened after I left the house—you can't say to a month, nor yet to a year, how long a skellington has laid there. Why should I be mixed up with such a disgraceful affair?"

Davidson could not help smiling in his prisoner's face. Mr. Kilner reddened.

"I'm surprised at you, Mr. Davidson," he said, "a laughing at me in such a serious affair as this here—one that affects my name and credit. I asked you, friendly like, to tell me what was set forth agen me."

"I'm sorry I smiled," said Davidson. "Well, Mr. Kilner, you seem nicely able to talk, so I'll tell you. We know all about your connection with Claye, both in Leeds and Bradford: we know that you hadn't a penny when you came to Dublin: we know that Claye made your house his hiding-place when he disappeared with the diamonds: we know that young Bexendale entered your house and was never seen to leave it: we know that you left Dublin immediately afterwards, after selling the goodwill of the business: we know that you have been living here as a man of considerable wealth. We know, too, that the bodies of Claye and of Bexendale, murdered, have been found in your old house, Mr. Kilner," concluded Davidson, forgetting the doctor's advice. "We've enough evidence against you to hang twenty men. Come now,

give up this affectation of innocence for your own sake. Make your peace, man, and tell the truth."

The effect of this appeal upon Mr. Kilner was not quite what might have been expected. He sat staring at his visitor while it was delivered, and once or twice he gasped for breath. But he did not faint, nor collapse, and he spoke quietly.

"Mr. Davidson," he said, "I would like to see the doctor. And after that, sir, I would like to have a few more words with you."

The Inspector went downstairs and sent up the doctor, who remained with his patient for some little time and then came back, bearing a note and a key.

"Mr. Keene," he said, "wishes one of you gentlemen—you, preferably, Inspector Davidson—to carry this letter and key to the manager of his bank in the town whose address you will find on the envelope there. The manager, on reading the note, will permit you to open a small safe which Mr. Keene has kept in the strong room of the bank. In that you will find a sealed packet—you will give the manager a receipt for it and bring it back to Mr. Keene. Who will go?"

"I will go myself," replied Davidson, taking the letter and key.

The doctor walked down the garden with him.

"I may tell you," he said, "that the man won't live till midnight. It isn't from any further shock—he's just sinking. You'd better be quick. I say—is he really guilty?"

"Not a doubt of it," answered Davidson and sped off to the town. He came back again well within the hour and was told that Kilner had been asking for him.

Going up to his room he found the doctor administer-

ing a stimulant. Mr. Kilner looked at the detective inquiringly.

"Have you got that little matter as you was good enough to fetch for me, Mr. Davidson?" he asked faintly.

Davidson drew out a small packet from his breast pocket—a packet done up in brown paper and sealed with large red seals—and handed it to the sick man. Mr. Kilner's fingers closed upon it with something like avidity—they laid it on the bed before him and patted it affectionately.

"Mr. Davidson," he said, "the doctor here tells me as how my end is a drawing nigh, and I'd like to make a good end, as befits a man that was asked to be a churchwarden. If you and Mr. Nicholson 'ud step upstairs I've something to say to you."

Davidson fetched Nicholson from below—Mr. Kilner acknowledged the latter's salutation with dignity.

"I don't bear you any ill-will, Mr. Nicholson," he said. "If you hadn't met me the other day none of this unpleasantness would have happened, but I bear ill-will to nobody—not even to you. A man as was to be made churchwarden of a parish church should forgive his worst enemies."

"Don't talk so much," said the doctor. "You've something to say, you know."

"I've something to say," answered Mr. Kilner, "and I will say it. If one of these here police gentlemen—as I was always good friends to when I had the power—would write it down——"

"I'll take it down," said Nicholson seating himself at a table by the bedside, and producing notebook and pencil.

"There isn't so very much to tell," said Kilner, "but what there is, you shall know of, and know it all. Write what I say——"

"This is the truth about what took place at my late establishment in Lower Abbey Street, in Dublin. Richard Claye, or James Creighton, by both of which names I knew him, came to my place one morning and said he wanted to be kept quiet for a bit, and I knew as how he'd been up to some of his games, but I didn't know what. He put on one of his disguises, and he went about Dublin for a day or two, and nobody would have known him—he lunched at the hotel where the robbery had been done, opposite the lady he'd robbed and Davidson there, and they didn't know him from Adam—he was that clever at disguises. But I didn't know anything about the diamonds: he never told me a word. On the second day in comes a chap with a black patch over one eye, and after a bit of fencing about tells me that his name was Bexendale and that he and Claye had arranged to get the diamonds and that Claye had played a trick on him, got them himself, and cleared out. Bexendale had recognized him in my bar by the tattoo marks on his wrist and by the short finger on one of his hands. Bexendale was that mad with Claye that he proposed to go into partnership with me with the notion of clearing Claye out of the way and getting the diamonds for ourselves. I told him I'd think about it, and I locked him up in a private room at the top of the house with plenty of whisky to make him comfortable. And there I left him and I waited till Claye comes in, and as soon as he came I told him about Bexendale."

At this point Mr. Kilner became a little faint and was

obliged to ask for stimulant. He presently recovered himself and continued the narrative.

"It was Claye as killed Bexendale—he shot him through the brain in the little room at the top of the back-stairs. Then, a bit later on, Davidson there came inquiring about Bexendale and I had to invent an excuse. But I was certain that Davidson would come back and search the house—though he never did—and I told Claye that we should have to get Bexendale's body out of the way. We carried it down to the bottom cellars between us. I knew of a sort of extra cellar beneath that where we could put him. We got him down there—and all of a sudden it flashed across me that if I could trap Claye there I had him and the diamonds too. There wasn't anybody could live in that hole very long, and I knew there were swarms of sewer rats come in there that would have eaten a live elephant. And so I frightened Claye into stepping down there, saying that the police were at the door, and I ran up and let the heavy flagstone down into its socket, and there he was—caged."

It was necessary to give Mr. Kilner a further stimulant. His memories at this point appeared to be giving him a great deal of trouble. But he presently went on.

"I didn't go near him for as long as I could help—I knew that the longer I stopped, the less nastiness there'd be. I kept off some time, cause, you see, I knew that rats wouldn't eat diamonds. At last I went. And this is what I want to say as the solemn truth. I'm accused of murdering Claye—I'm as innocent of Claye's death as the child unborn. He killed himself. I swear that the real truth is that when I went down there to get the diamonds, which I knew he carried about his waist in a belt, I found that

he'd shot himself through the head. That's the plain truth as to his death—it wasn't me as killed him. He killed himself."

Mr. Kilner paused, and the three men who had listened to him stared at each other as if endeavouring to realize the state of the man's mind. He, taking no notice, but fingering the parcel on the bed, presently continued.

"Now about them diamonds, as I consider was fairly mine, considering all the trouble I've taken to get hold of them. When I got settled down in this place, I began to dispose of them, one or two at a time, taking them to the merchants in Hatton Garden. I kept the necklace at the bank, and when I wanted to realize on it, I'd fetch it away, take a stone or two out, and put it back in the safe. It's in this parcel now, what there is left of it. There ought to be thirty-four stones still left. And now I've no further use for them I shall give them up with pleasure."

Mr. Kilner ceased, and holding up the packet asked in a feeble voice if some one would lend him a knife. He cut the strings, broke the seal, undid the loose paper wrappings and drew out the mutilated necklace, and he handed it to Inspector Davidson. "Take it to the window and count them," he said.

The two detectives and the doctor went over to the window to examine the necklace which had been so closely connected with crime and violence. And as they looked it over and whispered about it they heard a strange sound behind them and turned to find Mr. Kilner fallen sideways on his pillows. The doctor leapt to his side and raised a hand that grasped a small bottle from which came a faint odour as of crushed almonds.

"My God!" said the doctor, "Prussic acid. He's done it."

Mr. Kilner had kept his last card up his sleeve till the final round.

CHAPTER V

MISS DRISCOLL CLAIMS HER OWN

When Miss Teresa Driscoll recognized that the diamond necklace which had come to her in such strange fashion and by which she had set such great store had vanished into the unknown and seemed to be totally lost to her, she first of all gave Sergeant Davidson a piece of her mind in her most characteristic way (hinting to him that he would have been well served if she had meted out to him the treatment which she accorded to young Bexendale) for his folly in letting the younger criminal escape him, and then made haste to shake the dust of Dublin from her feet. She was one of those women who do not believe in crying over spilt milk, and she had her first duty to perform. She felt thankful that the solid cash which the eccentric Mr. Finney had left her had not gone the way of the diamonds—that, she knew, was as safe as the Bank of England, and there was enough of it to pay off her father's debts, buy her father's old house, if it was still in existence and habitable, and settle down in comfort for the rest of her days. So she said farewell to Davidson and Dublin, with more celerity than affection, and making her way back to Limerick, resolved to let bygones be bygones so far as the diamonds were concerned and to make the best of an undeniably bad job.

Miss Driscoll remained very quietly in her native town for nearly a week, during which time she looked at many things and was much looked at herself. Nobody recognized

her, though a good many people were struck by her appearance, for she was a dashing figure of a woman and had a face that betokened the resolute brain that lay behind it. She soon found that Castle Cleerycrow was not only standing but in good repair and actually in the market, and going very quickly to work with the aid of a smart solicitor whom she took into her confidence, she quickly had the title-deeds in her possession. A week later she was installed in company with a suitable companion and a small household, in the old rooms, and was able to go to bed at night to the music of the Shannon, murmuring just at the foot of her grounds. That done, she carried out her plan of paying her late father's debts. She knew the names of the creditors, and each—or his legal representative, for some had already been gathered to their fathers—were summoned to meet Miss Driscoll and her man of law at the principal hotel in the city on a certain day. To add to the joy with which Miss Driscoll desired to fill them, they were all left in ignorance of what was in store for them. When they found on arriving at the rendezvous that a magnificent luncheon was spread for their benefit—presided over by the man of law—and that the first business was to do justice to it, and to the excellent wines which accompanied it, their delight was truly Irish, and by the time that the repast was over and the chairman introduced the subject of the meeting and told them why they had been called together, no assemblage more completely full of peace and goodwill could have been found in the three kingdoms.

Upon this occasion, Miss Driscoll, who was introduced into the midst of the assemblage with great state by the man of law at the end of his formal notification, made the

speech of her life. She told her father's creditors that she had always meant to pay them in full: that she had worked hard to pay them in full: that she was at last able to pay them in full: that they would be paid in full—with interest at three per cent. per annum. She added that she trusted the name of Driscoll would now shine clear of the tarnish that had once dimmed its glories, and that it would be set amongst the brightest of its many brilliant traditions that its last surviving representative had by her own sheer hard work dragged it out of the mud in which misfortune had cast it, had cleansed it of all defilement, and covered it with imperishable honour. The conclusion of this speech was the signal for wild and enthusiastic cheers, after which Miss Driscoll personally handed to each creditor a cheque on the Bank of Ireland for the sum due to him. She then withdrew, amidst further demonstrations of great enthusiasm, but her guests remained drinking her health for some time before they separated to spread the news all over the city and the countryside.

Miss Driscoll became something of a heroine and a character. Within a week of her just and generous action she had received two offers of marriage, one from a half-pay officer who told her that he had been seeking such a noble woman for over forty years: the other from a fox-hunting squire who was deeply dipped in every direction, and had decided that a woman must naturally be much more inclined to pay her husband's debts than her father's. To these disinterested offers Miss Driscoll returned a polite refusal. She knew that she would have others, and others duly came—came with such regularity that she took them as a matter of course and paid little heed to them. To bachelor clergymen, half-pay officers,

captains who cherished a secret conviction that they would here get another step. Majors who felt that it was time they were settling down; to all these gentlemen who preferred money and maturity to youth and beauty, Miss Driscoll presented vast fascinations. But she seemed indisposed to marriage, and at the end of two years and six months she was still as virgin as ever.

It was at this time that the great event of Miss Driscoll's life entered on its final stage. Miss Driscoll and her chosen companion, Miss Francis O'Leary, a lady who was about her own age, were spending a few weeks of summer at the Royal Marine Hotel, Kingstown, and were thoroughly enjoying their holiday. It may be that she enjoyed it all the more because there was also staying in the house a certain Sir Octavius Burke, K.C.B., who some years previously had been British Commissioner of Dahlcurrie in Hindustan, and who in consequence had a poorish liver, but a pretty fortune. Apart from an occasional testiness of temper, caused by the vagaries of his liver, Sir Octavius was a very pleasant-mannered gentleman of sixty, of distinguished appearance, aristocratic features, and pretty parted hair. He made himself very agreeable to Miss Driscoll, and in a lesser sense to Miss O'Leary, accompanying them in various excursions, sitting with them in the garden of the hotel, walking with them on the breakwater, and chatting with them at and after dinner. Miss Driscoll began to think Sir Octavius a decidedly nice man, Sir Octavius had long since decided that Miss Driscoll was a fine woman for her age (she had confided the exact truth as to that little matter to him in a confidential moment wherein Miss O'Leary had gone in search of Miss Driscoll's needlework) as a woman possibly could

be: the other folk staying in the hotel, indeed, were beginning to think that there was what women somewhat mysteriously call something in it. It was then that the great event began to have its beginning.

One fine morning Miss Driscoll and Miss O'Leary, having breakfasted, repaired to the garden of the hotel with their sunshades, their fancy work, and newspapers. Miss O'Leary, who was somewhat sentimental, forgot fancy work and newspapers for the beautiful bay that stretched before her, and the brilliant sunshine that shone upon it —she folded her hands and indulged in day dreams. Miss Driscoll, who was of a much more practical turn of mind, opened the *Irish Times* and read the news. And at the sweetest moment of Miss O'Leary's meditations Miss Driscoll uttered nothing less than a scream and let the paper drop on the gravelled walk.

"Mercy upon me!" she groaned. "Fanny O'Leary—the diamonds."

Miss O'Leary came back to earth from the heaven in which she was sailing. "The diamonds!" she exclaimed. "Teresa, not—not the diamonds you were robbed of in Dublin?"

Miss Driscoll glanced out of the tail of her eye across the northern waters of the bay. In imagination she saw the hotel at North Wall.

"Yes," she said, "themselves. They've found them, Fanny, or rather," she exclaimed, changing from a surprised to a woe-begone tone, "they've found some of them. Look at this, now—here it all is in the paper."

She pointed to a column which was headed in heavy black letters, *Strange Sequel to a Dublin Mystery,* and pushed the newspaper over to her companion to read.

While Miss O'Leary read and marvelled, Miss Driscoll sat and thought. She was wondering about many things, but chiefly of the tragedies which had attended the diamond necklace. The story which was enfolded in the newspaper was that of the Lower Abbey Street tragedy, of the disappearance of the diamonds, of the subsequent detection of Kilner, and of the latter's arrest and suicide. The robbery of the diamonds from a lady's person during the lady's residence at a Dublin hotel was referred to, but the lady's name was not given. Full justice was done to everything, and a description of the now despoiled and mutilated necklace was given.

"They don't mention your name, Teresa," said Miss O'Leary disappointedly. "I was hoping they would do that."

"No," said Miss Driscoll, "they don't. But it doesn't matter, Fanny. Look there, now," and she pointed to a closing paragraph which stated that the necklace was at that time in the hands of Inspector Davidson, of Dublin, who had just returned with it from North Wall. "Look at that, I tell you. In Davidson's hands—and, well, Davidson knows whose property it is."

"Perhaps he's written to you at Castle Cleerycrow, Teresa," suggested Miss O'Leary. "You see 'twas only last night he returned to Dublin."

"Maybe and maybe not," said Miss Driscoll, "but I'll soon settle the matter. Come into the hotel, Fanny, and let's get ready for Dublin. We'll catch the train for Westland Row, and see Mr. Davidson at once. I'm not going to have my diamonds—what's left of them—knocking about in the police offices. Come away."

Within an hour Miss Driscoll and Miss O'Leary were

shown into Inspector Davidson's office. He seemed somewhat surprised to see them, but made no remark until they had seated themselves. And then:—

"Why, Miss Driscoll," he exclaimed, "you must have come by one of these new air-ships they've talking about. It's only an hour since I wired to you, and here you are. That's quick work from Limerick."

"I haven't come from Limerick," said Miss Driscoll, rather acidly. "I am staying at Kingstown and I saw the article in the *Irish Times,* and so I naturally came straight to you. I want my diamond necklace, Mr. Davidson—or what is left of it—I hear it's been pretty badly treated. It's had its history."

The Inspector sighed too, and unlocking a safe took out a small packet. He laid it on the desk before him and looked at Miss Driscoll and sighed again.

"Yes," he said, "about half the stones are gone, Miss Driscoll. And as you say, it's had it's history. If that thing were mine," he continued it with some show of sentiment, "I should throw it into the sea. I shouldn't like to have it about me after knowing where it's been."

"Oh, fudge, man!" said Miss Driscoll. "What do I care about where it's been? It isn't alive—it can't talk. And diamonds are diamonds."

"Ye-es," said the Inspector dubiously. "And I've heard some of these precious stones have malign influences. I don't know enough about such things to be able to express an opinion on such a point, but the history of that necklace would incline me to believe it. If you've read that article in the papers you'll know nothing but crime has dogged the fortunes of these diamonds ever since they came into your possession. I suppose you ladies will wear

anything in the shape of gems," he continued, with a sly glance at Miss O'Leary, "but I wouldn't like to wear anything that had been where that necklace was for a while —round the body of a corpse that was being worried by sewer rats. Ugh!"

"Did you ever hear of such sickly sentiment," exclaimed Miss Driscoll. "What do I care about rats? Rats don't eat diamonds. Let me see what the human rats have done at them, Mr. Davidson. I'm like all women—I want to see my property."

The Inspector smiled a little wearily as he undid the wrappings of the parcel. He took out the mutilated necklace and laid it on his desk. Miss Driscoll and Miss O'Leary left their chairs and drew near to examine it. Davidson laid a hand on it as the impatient owner was about to take it up.

"One moment, Miss Driscoll," he said. "I suppose there's no doubt whatever that the diamond necklace is your property?"

"My property?" said Miss Driscoll, "you know it's my property."

"That's just what I don't know," answered Davidson. "I know it was in your possession on the night of the robbery at North Wall, and I know how it came to be in your possession. But how did the man Finney come to get hold of it?"

"What have I to do with that?" said Miss Driscoll, "it's neither here nor there."

"Yes," said Davidson, rising and retaining his grasp on the necklace, "it's both here and there. Miss Driscoll, you'll pardon me, but this necklace was stolen from its real owner some years ago. Its real owner has turned up

this morning and established his claim by indisputable evidence. He's in the next room—he wishes to see you."

As he spoke Davidson threw open the door of the apartment and revealed the face and figure of . . . *Sir Octavius Burke.*

CHAPTER VI

SIR OCTAVIUS BURKE

Sir Octavius walked into the room bowing and smiling to the two ladies, one of whom at least was too much astonished to respond to the bows or smiles, or to the polite salute with which she was greeted. Miss Driscoll, indeed, felt that an earthquake would have been a mild thing compared with this: she was suddenly turned into a statue, incapable of anything; she saw Davidson close the door, come back to his desk and take his seat, she heard him invite Sir Octavius Burke to take a chair; she saw the baronet politely motioning her to seat herself, but she saw and heard as a statue might—woodenly and stonily. When her faculties came back to her with a sudden rush, forceful as an Alpine avalanche, she burst out with one word, delivered point blank at Sir Octavius.

"You!"

Sir Octavius bowed again in his most polite manner.

"I fear," he said, "that there is no doubt—shall I say no possible doubt, whatever, Miss O'Leary?—that the diamond necklace is mine, Miss Driscoll. Suppose you take a seat and listen to the story of the diamonds? It will interest you—and it is right you should know it."

But Miss Driscoll was not yet in a proper state to listen to anything. She stared at Sir Octavius, at Miss O'Leary, at Inspector Davidson—she stared at the four walls of the room, one after the other, as if she were not

quite certain of her surroundings. Miss O'Leary began to look alarmed.

"Teresa," she said soothingly, "take it gently—and sensibly, Teresa."

The word sensibly recalled the last of Miss Driscoll's scattered faculties. She glanced at her companion and sank into the chair which Sir Octavius was holding for her.

"Sensibly," she exclaimed. "Gracious goodness! Fanny O'Leary, what are you talking about? As if I should ever do anything that wasn't sensible. Sensibly indeed! I wish everybody was as full of common sense as I am. No—no —I'll take it with all the sense in the world, but goodness me—to think that it's him!"

She indicated Sir Octavius with an outstretched finger as if he had been a waxwork figure. Sir Octavius bowed and smiled.

"And why not me, Miss Driscoll?" he said, regardless of exactitude of language. "Why not me, my dear lady? There is nothing strange, I hope, in the fact that I was once the possessor of a very fine necklace of diamonds which, alas! has passed through many vicissitudes and is now—equally alas!—not so valuable as it was. I think there is nothing strange in that, my dear Miss Driscoll?"

"No," replied Miss Driscoll, "perhaps not. But still—and how do I know that they are yours?" she suddenly said. "I wouldn't doubt your word, Sir Octavius, for all the diamonds in the world, but I should like to know positively that these diamonds are yours—it's due to me to be assured of that fact."

"Certainly," said Sir Octavius, "it is precisely what I wish. But you may rest assured, Miss Driscoll, that the

person from whom you received the diamond necklace never had the least title to it, and that he probably got possession of it by murder."

"What, Finney!" exclaimed Miss Driscoll. "Is the world coming to an end? But there, I don't believe that Finney would have murdered anybody. He was the softest-hearted, most sentimental good creature I ever knew."

"Nevertheless Mr. Finney never had any legal title to the diamonds, Miss Driscoll," said Sir Octavius, "therefore you never had. The necklace has passed through many hands since it left mine, and it has been the source of many foul misdeeds, but it is mine and no one else's, as I will now prove to you. Give me the necklace, Inspector, if you please."

Davidson handed the necklace over—Sir Octavius, possessing himself of the Inspector's blotting pad laid the necklace lengthwise across it, with the diamonds face downward. He placed an elegant forefinger on a sort of medallion in the centre of the gold work in which the stones were set.

"Now observe," said he, "although this poor ornament has passed through so many hands, no one, I will venture to swear, has found out the secret of this medallion, which was wrought by a very cunning worker in metal—an Hindu—Look!"

Sir Octavius pressed his finger nail on the side of the medallion—a lid flew up and revealed a cavity, wherein was packed a tiny roll of yellowish parchment.

"Oblige me, Inspector," said Sir Octavius, "by taking out that little document and reading what is written upon it."

Davidson picked the bit of parchment out with a pin, unrolled it, and gazed at the writing traced upon it. It was no larger than a penny stamp, and the writing was most minute, but so clear that he could easily read it, and he presently read out these words:—

THIS NECKLET OF 63 STONES WAS GIVEN TO OCTAVIUS BURKE BY THE MAHARANEE OF DAHLCURRIE, HINDUSTAN, IN RETURN FOR A VALUABLE SERVICE.

"Now, Miss Driscoll," continued Sir Octavius, "I think that settles the question of ownership. That, and certain facts which I have been able to put before them, have satisfied the authorities here, at any rate, and the diamond necklace is acknowledged by them to be my property. Is not that so, Inspector?"

"It is, Sir Octavius—the necklace is undoubtedly yours," replied Davidson.

"In that case," said Sir Octavius, "I will put it in my pocket and proceed to tell you how I came to lose it, how I have been endeavouring to trace it, and how at last I was lucky enough to supply a missing link in my chain of evidence by reading the extraordinary narrative in the *Irish Times* this morning."

"Ah!" said Miss Driscoll, "so you read it, did you?"

"I read it, ma'am, over a cup of tea, in bed, at eight o'clock," replied Sir Octavius, "and by nine o'clock I was in this office. I had a good two hours start of you, Miss Driscoll, though it really wouldn't have mattered if you'd had six of me. But now, for my story."

Sir Octavius settled himself in his chair, folded his arms across his tightly buttoned frockcoat and commenced the following narrative:—

"It is scarcely necessary," he said, looking round upon Miss Driscoll, Miss O'Leary, and Inspector Davidson with a polite bow and smile, "to tell you how and why it was that the Maharanee of Dahlcurrie—a most beautiful and deeply interesting woman—presented me with the diamond necklace which, like Helen of Troy, has been the cause of so much agitation and trouble—though, of course, of a very different nature. It is sufficient to say that I stood high—very high indeed—in her esteem, and, I may say, her favour, and she wished, with all the magnificence of the Oriental, to reward me in the most substantial manner. Her reward was the necklace of diamonds which at last has come back to me—I grieve to say in mutilated state—after many years of separation. Let us say no more of her—we will pass on to the way in which the diamonds were lost.

"When I quitted India after a long, and I may say distinguished, career, I sailed from Bombay on the *Bramaputra,* I carried the diamond necklace with me as a matter of course, for I had view of disposing of it in Europe rather than in India. You may possibly remember, some of you, that the *Bramaputra* went to pieces on a hidden reef on the north coast of Africa and that many of her passengers and crew were lost. I was one of the survivors; my life was saved, but my diamond necklace was lost. How, or at what moment it was stolen from me I have not been able to make out—all that I know is, it was stolen about the time that trouble came to the *Bramaputra.*

"I never heard anything of my necklace again, as you may very well conceive, and for five years I gave up all hope of ever recovering it. Then a strange thing hap-

pened; the newspapers rang for several days with startling accounts of a series of sensational murders in the south-west of England, round about Plymouth and Dartmoor. I read them out of mere curiosity. What happened was this—a Jew pawnbroker, Aaron Josephs, well known in Plymouth, was found strangled in his back parlour. A Hindu known to some of the sea-going fraternity in Plymouth and Devonport as Lal Dass, was found stabbed through the heart in a low lodging house. A seaman named John Lindsay was found in a hut on Dartmoor, half-burnt, but recognizable, though his skull had been battered almost to pieces. He had been stripped, and near him lay a heap of convict's clothes. At the same time an escaped convict from Dartmoor, one Stefano Vassalli, was shot dead by a pursuing party of warders, and he was found to be wearing Lindsay's clothes. Two men had shot Vassalli —warders named Lloyd and Hollins. Within a few hours of Vassalli's death, Lloyd and Hollins returned to the spot, and Hollins murdered Lloyd by dashing out his brains with a stone, and buried the body in a crevice in the rocks. After that Hollins disappeared, and from that day to this has never been heard of.

"Now I began to see some chances of tracing my diamonds. I had a list of the names of every man, woman, or child, passenger or crew, on the *Bramaputra,* and amongst them were the names of Lal Dass, John Lindsay, and Stefano Vassalli. I came to the conclusion that these were the thieves!—these were the men who had stolen my necklace, and that the necklace was the cause of this chain of murders. And I put it in this way—that in some fashion or other Vassalli, when shot by the warders, was in possession of the necklace; that Lloyd and Hollins

found it on him; that Hollins murdered Lloyd for the sake of it.

"The thing was to find Hollins—but Hollins could not be found. He had vanished as completely as if he had evaporated into thin air. I did all that I could, and the police did all they could, to trace him, but our labours were without the least result. He had been a soldier and hailed originally from Castleford, in Yorkshire, and to Castleford, after some time, we went. But nothing had been seen or heard of Hollins in Castleford for years. All trace of him was lost.

"I gave up active measures then, but I kept my eyes on the papers, for one finds clues there when one least expects them. I found nothing until this morning. Then I saw the article in the *Irish Times*. I came immediately to Inspector Davidson and found out that the necklace was undoubtedly mine, and where the missing link in the chain of evidence lay. He told me, Miss Driscoll, that you had come from Castleford with the necklace—Castleford, the place where we could not find a trace of Hollins, but with which we knew that he had the close ties of birth!—and that it had been left to you by a man named Finney, who carried on various professions, and amongst them that of money-lender. And then I saw through the whole thing.

"It may all be wrong; it may be only theory, but this is what I think really happened. Hollins did murder Lloyd for the sake of the diamonds which they had found on Vassalli, and he did contrive to get to Castleford, to Finney, whom he probably knew before, and who was very likely a fence as well as a money-lender. And I conceive that Finney killed him, as *he* had killed Lloyd, for

the sake of the diamonds. That was the missing link I wanted—what has happened to the diamonds since, you know as well as I."

Sir Octavius brought his narrative abruptly to a close. He rose, drew on his pearl-grey gloves, and looked at Miss Driscoll with an air of solicitude.

"Permit me," he said, "to escort Miss O'Leary and yourself back to Kingstown. This long story has wearied you."

Miss Driscoll felt that there was more behind this than there seemed to be on the surface; she and Miss O'Leary rose obediently.

"You'll excuse me, Sir Octavius," said Inspector Davidson as the baronet shook hands with him, "but what are you going to do with those diamonds? If they were mine, you know, I should throw them into the sea."

"Ha—ha—ha—!" laughed Sir Octavius. "You're a sentimentalist, my dear sir, a sentimentalist. What! throw away such a splendid collection of gems of the first water? No—no—I can do better, much better, than that with them."

"But what will you do with them?" asked the Inspector.

Sir Octavius looked round. He and the Inspector stood at the door of the latter's room; Miss Driscoll and Miss O'Leary were strolling away along the corridor outside, pensive and thoughtful. Sir Octavius stretched a finger towards Miss Driscoll's unconscious figure.

"I shall let my wife have 'em," he whispered. "Do you see?"

Sir Octavius followed the ladies, chuckling to himself. The Inspector went back into his room, put his feet on

his desk, lighted a cigar, and folded his arm. He stared at the ceiling.

"I wish I could have hanged that damned old Kilner!" he said.

THE END